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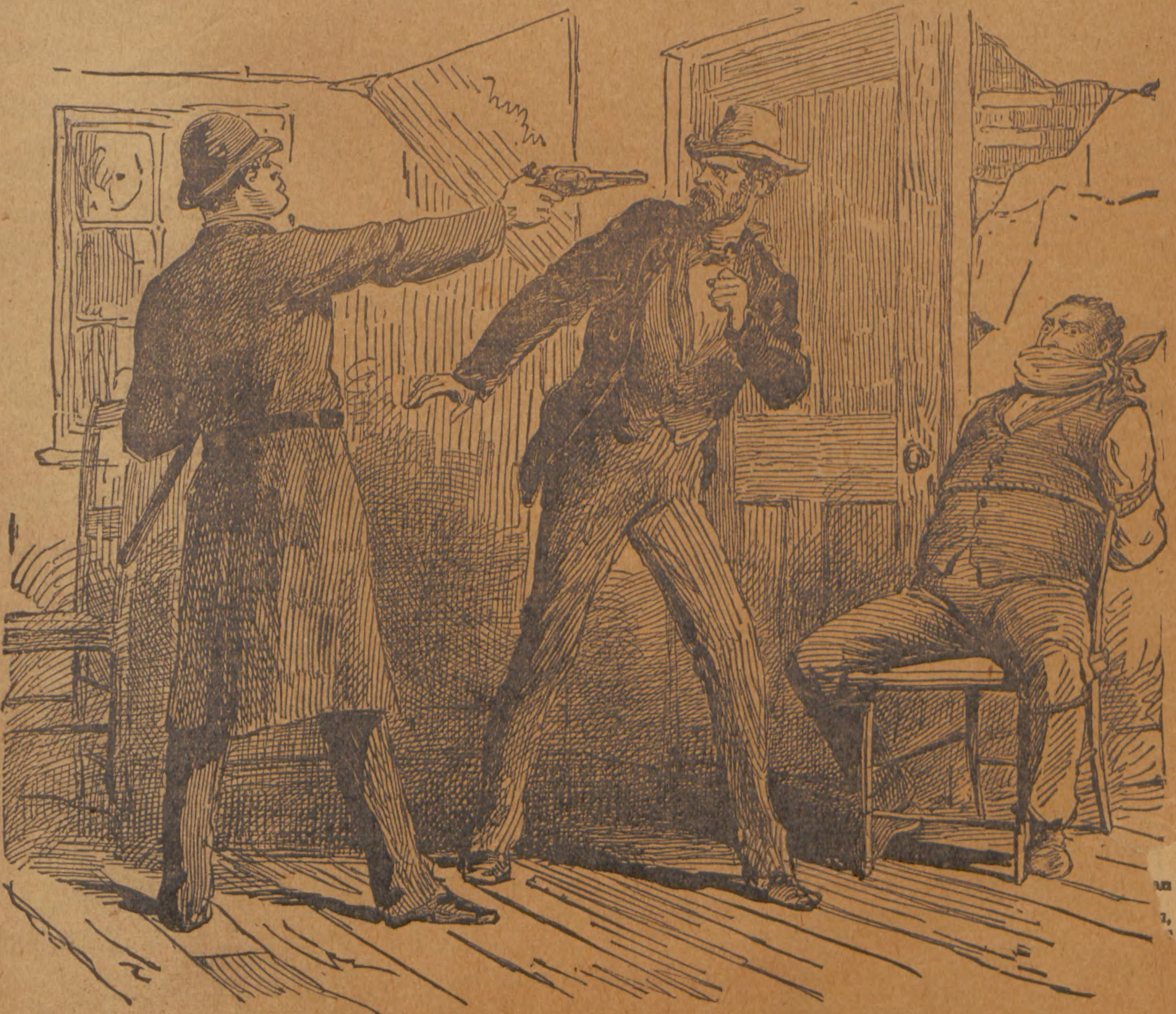
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SHADOWED; or, Bob Rockett's Fight for Life.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "BOB ROCKETT, THE BANK RUNNER," "BOB ROCKETT, THE BOY DODGER," "WILL WILDFIRE," ETC., ETC.



"YES, YOU, YOU HOUND! DO YOU FANCY I AM GOING TO LEAVE YOU HERE TO SET THE DOGS LOOSE ON MY TRACK!
COME ON, NOW, I'M NOT IN THE MOOD FOR FOOLING."

Shadowed;

OR,

Bob Rockett's Fight for Life.

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CHAPTER I.

A DESCENT OF THE POLICE.

THE room was by no means an attractive one. The house which contained it was a dilapidated structure on one of the meanest streets on the East river side of New York. The room itself was a narrow, low-ceilinged apartment, with the plaster broken here and there on the whitewashed walls, and with the ceiling so thickly festooned with cobwebs that the very sight of it would have been torture to any neat housekeeper.

It was very sparsely furnished. Two or three chairs, a dilapidated table, and a small stove adapted for both cooking and warming, formed the main articles of furniture, while the only adornments were certain newspaper prints of prize-fighters tacked up upon the walls.

Yet the proprietor of this apartment seemed to fancy that he had a princely residence, by the self-satisfied air with which he rubbed his hands together as he looked proudly about him.

"There's no use talking, Bob," he remarked, with a lordly air. "Arter a chap's been kicked round the world, and never had as much as a pig-pen that he could call home, it's somethin' to git a cranny o' your own. I don't want to brag of this domicile, and I s'pose there's neater got-up riggings out of Fifthavenue; but I never did go in for luxury, Bob; it's solid comfort I want, and I've a notion a chap'd be a hog that couldn't be comfortable here."

The speaker was a tall, lank, rusty-looking fellow, with little foxy eyes, and a perpetual smirk upon his features, as if he wished to be always ready with a smile for every occasion.

His companion was his very opposite in every particular. He was short, hardly up to the middle height, and so broad shouldered as to make him look still shorter. He was dressed in a rough garb, though it was worn with the careless ease of one accustomed to good clothes and good society, while there was a certain air upon his rather plain features which indicated that he was somewhat out of place in this locality. It was not exactly an air of refinement, yet it was the look of one accustomed to higher social conditions.

This individual glanced around the room with a cynical expression, as if he was saying to himself, "The chap would have some of the instincts of the hog that *could* be satisfied here." But he did not give expression to such thoughts.

"Yes, you're rather neatly fixed," he rejoined. "I see only one thing wanting."

"What's that?"

"A broom."

"And what in the blazes would a chap do with a broom here?" angrily.

"Oh, maybe you like cobweb hangings. If you do don't disturb them on my account. It's only a question of taste."

The host had his eyes fixed reflectively on the ceiling.

"Blow it all! I never noticed them," he remarked. "But I guess they ain't doin' no harm. They don't spile my appetite."

"All right, Beau. It's your castle. If you like spiders for company it's none of my business."

They were silent for several minutes, Beau eyeing the ceiling with a disquieted look, as if his perfect content had been disturbed. The serpent had crept into his paradise.

The other man wore a rather distrustful expression. He now brooded over the stove, now rose and walked to the window, and at all times seemed to have an air of listening, paying but little heed to the constant talk of his companion.

Beau at length turned with a sigh from his contemplation of the cobwebs.

"That last job was a blasted cruel, ugly bit of work," he remarked, with emphasis. "I didn't think it was in him."

"What job?" quickly.

"That murder. To think that Sally Crapper, as I've hobnobbed with many's the time, and who's give me many a bit when I'd gone hungry only for her good heart, should 'a' been knocked

in the head by that beast of a Rusty Mike! Blast his dirty picture. I hope he'll swing for it! Why there wasn't such a whole-souled woman in this here town of New York as Sally Crapper, and it's hard to think of her being slaughtered like a mangy dog by her snarling brute of a husband! It's enough to fetch the tears to a chap's eyes, Bob."

"Yes," answered Bob, absently, still with that air of listening.

"Yes? And is that all you've got to say for poor Sally, as you've known since you were as tall as a half-grown grasshopper? Blame me if I didn't think you had more feeling!"

This was an unusual show of indignation for Beau Bink. His face appeared quite odd without its habitual smirk. Bob looked at him with some disquiet.

"Don't be getting on your ear, old fellow," he growled. "Mike Crapper is a butcher, I know, but I have other fish to fry just now." He sprung up and walked quickly to the window, which looked down upon the street. "See here, Beau, how many ways are there of getting out of this house?"

"Why there's the front and the back doors," answered Beau, with surprise. "I don't know any other way except the windows."

"There's the skylight, I suppose?"

"Yes; if anybody wants to go to heaven. Why what's blowed loose? Is the stars on your track? Spin it out, Bob. What's the fun?"

He approached Bob somewhat excitedly. The very mention of a mystery of this sort appealed to his feelings.

"It's that confounded bank business," answered Bob. "They've been tracking me ever since the night we opened the Provident. Hang them, some traitor has put them on my trail, and they've tracked me from place to place these three days, like sleuth-hounds."

"Aha! old fox! And so you put in here to earth, eh? But, I'm a quiet family man. They won't think there's nothing wrong in a gentleman calling on his honest friend. Robert Rockett, Esq., calls to see Mr. Beau Bink. That's the style, isn't it? Why they'd as soon think of looking for hens' eggs in an alligator's nest."

"That's all very nice, Beau, but a bad name sticks to a man. And—by the fiends, yes, it is as I thought! They have tracked me here."

His keen eyes had observed something suspicious in the street, upon which opened the single window of the room. He started hastily back, calling out:

"You must hide me somewhere, Beau, and swear that black's blue if you've had a mouse to visit you to-day. You can lie with as straight a face as any man I know. Look out of the window. Easy, easy! Don't let your head show. Tell me what you see."

"Nothing, except that there's a couple of men leaning against the lamp-post. Plain-looking coons, dressed in gray toggery."

"Can you make out their faces?"

"One's got on gold spectacles. He's got a long nose, and a mouth like a fish-tail. Looks as if he'd lived by swallowing mackerel whole. T'other's a strapping tall chap, rather a pretty-faced coon. He's got side-whiskers, and his hair well down his neck."

"That will do! Come back from there!" was Bob's quick order. "How does this house open out back?"

"Why, there's a yard, which a half-grown chicken might have room to stretch her wings in. Back of that there's a narrow alley, as leads up to the back gates of all the houses on this row. It opens out into Brewess Court. T'other end's a blind alley."

"Take a squint out back, Beau. Keep out of sight, but try and get a glimpse of the alley. Careful, now!"

"Trust me," answered Beau. "I've practiced lookin' out a winder, afore now."

He was absent from the room for several minutes, during which Bob paced the floor impatiently, though he took care to not approach the window. There was a second door to the room, which he opened and looked into the space beyond it. It displayed a dark hall, with doors on each side, and a staircase beyond.

He was still striding uneasily about when Beau returned.

"What news?" cried Bob, hastily.

There was an expression of mystery and of importance upon Beau's face. He seemed swelling with information.

"Things are looking blue," he answered, with a knowing grimace.

"Come Out with it! Is the alley under guard?"

"I caught a glint of a hat over the fence. A blasted official hat. But, that isn't the worst."

"What is the worst then? Hang you! a scarecrow would get the blues, waiting on you!"

Beau twitched his thumb mysteriously over his shoulder.

"I'm afeard it's all up, Bob. Except you choose to try the sky-light. And that'll only set you adrift on a steep roof, where there's not another within twenty feet of the same height. They're in the house below, in force too. They are searching the ground floor now. They'll be up here inside of five minutes. It's a clear sell, Bob; you might as well give up the ship."

"Not so soon," replied Bob, quietly. At this near approach of danger his momentary excitement had disappeared, and he was as cool as if some mere game was being played.

He walked to the door of the room, opened it, and listened to the sounds that came up from below.

"They are on the second floor now," he quietly said.

"That will soon be settled. It hasn't more than half a dozen rooms."

Beau regarded his visitor doubtfully. Was he going to get into trouble himself?

"This door," said Bob, pointing to the door which opened upon the dark hall. "Where does it lead?"

"To a back stairs."

"Which runs up and down?"

"Yes."

Bob stood a moment reflecting. Then a look of decision came upon his face. He stooped down and took off his shoes.

"Open the front door a crack," he said to Beau. "Listen and tell me when you hear a footstep upon the stairs."

He did the same himself by the rear door. Several minutes passed, during which utter silence reigned in the room. Then Beau spoke in a low, cautious tone.

"They have finished below. They are leaving a watch at the foot of the stairs. They will be up here in less than a minute."

No answer came from his visitor. He looked quickly around. The back door was closed. Bob had disappeared.

"Well, I'll be cosmogrified if that ain't queer! Is the feller green enough to s'pose that there won't be no darbies at the back stairs? Maybe he's heeled it up-stairs, so's to put off the difficulty 's long as he kin. Anyhow I'm glad he's out of this domicile."

Beau seated himself beside the stove, crossed his heels upon its hearth, and seemed to be deeply absorbed in the columns of a newspaper which he had picked up from the floor.

"There's only the garret floor over this," he muttered. "But a fyer couldn't hide there. There's only three rooms, and two of them is as empty as the palm of my hand. Old Jack Brown lives in the other, when he's not on a drunk. But, I don't b'lieve a cat could hide under his furniture. Then there's the skylight. But, s'pose he got on the roof? why, he'd be like a rat on a floatin' chip. He couldn't git off."

The sounds outside were coming nearer. He became deeply interested in his paper.

The back-door of the room opened, and two men entered. Beau looked quickly up from his paper. They were evidently policemen, though not in uniform.

"Hillo! gentlemen! you might have knocked," cried Beau.

Without answering, they fixed their eyes keenly upon him, and then looked around the room with a sharp glance. They were evidently men accustomed to take in a great deal at a single sweep of the eye. There was a closet at one side of the room. This was quickly flung open by one of the uninvited visitors.

"That's right," cried Beau, sarcastically.

"Make yourselves at home. I allers like to see gentlemen act as if they enjoyed themselves. Only, I'm despr'et afeard if cool impudence was to strike in, it might be a bad go for the pair of ye."

The men continued their investigation without the slightest attention to him.

"There's nothing here," said one of them, at length.

"Well, I'm obliged to you for that opinion, anyhow," rejoined Beau, resuming his paper. "I was jest a-thinking if you found anything of vally, that I'd like to go halves with you. Good-by, if you must be going."

"Dry up, now!" said one of the men, sourly. "It's lucky for you that the chap we are looking for isn't here, that's all."

They turned toward the door by which they had entered. At the same moment the front door of the room opened, and a third man came in.

"What luck?" he asked, addressing the other two.

"None, yet. This is the only man we've seen."

The third man fixed his sharp eyes on the proprietor of the room. Beau twisted uneasily under the look.

"Ha!" exclaimed the officer. "Here's an old friend, at any rate. Beau Bink, by all that's funny. Playing 'possum over a newspaper. Come, come, Beau, the jig's up. Where is he?"

"What's wrong?" asked Beau, defiantly. "There's nothing ag'in' me. I'm an honest citizen of New York, and don't owe no man a penny."

"No squirming now, my hearty. He's an old friend of yours. Where is he?"

"Who?" asked Bob, with a show of ignorance.

"You know very well. Your old pal, Bob Rockett."

"Bob Rockett? Old Bob, hey? Why I ain't twigged him for—now let me see— Why, blast it all, Bob's kicked the bucket. Shot in that rascally bank job. You oughter know that."

"Let up, my man. That's a played-out game. He's been tracked here. Come, out with it!"

"Bob Rockett? Why you don't mean to say as how he's come to life again? It'd be jist like Bob though. So yer arter him fer that bank business?"

"Bank business be fizzled! Do you suppose we'd turn out this way for a dropped-through job like that?" He lowered his voice to its deepest tones. "Murder's the jig, my friend! It's a murderer we want."

"Murder?" Beau sprung excitedly to his feet.

"Yes. Bob Rockett has come to life again; and what's more he had a hand in the murder of Sally Crapper. There's positive proof against him. You would not help a murderer to escape?"

An ejaculation of surprise and horror came from Beau's lips.

"Sally Crapper! Prove it to me, and by heavens, I'll be a worse hound than any of you on his track."

As he spoke another man entered the room:

"We have searched the upper story," he announced. "It's empty. Our man is not in the house."

"That's a lie!" cried Beau excitedly. "He is in the house.—Murdered Sally Crapper, did he? Follow me, gentlemen."

CHAPTER II.

BEAU BINK IS SLIGHTLY SURPRISED.

BUT what has become of Bob Rockett? It is no easy matter to escape from a house swarming with policemen, and yet he had in some strange manner given them the slip. But presence of mind, quickness and energy will accomplish seemingly impossible things, and these were the only agents used by Bob in his extraordinary escape.

No matter how sharp men may be they are apt to overlook slight contingencies, and leave open loopholes through which a resolute man may safely slip.

Thus the officers delegated to search by way of the back stairway, which led up, as we are aware, to the passage-way back of Beau Bink's room, imagined that they had taken every necessary precaution when they left one of their number on guard at the foot of the stairs, while two others ascended to the upper stories and searched every room which they met in their progress.

Bob, at the rear door of Beau's room, had, through a slight opening, seen these two men make their appearance at the head of the stairs, and stop a moment to decide upon their next movements. The fugitive grasped in his hands the heavy shoes which he had just taken from his feet, and a stern look came upon his face as he saw the two men start forward along the passage. Evidently he did not intend to be taken without one blow for liberty.

They slowly advanced through the dark passage until they reached the two doors which opened nearly opposite each other, on the two sides of the entry way.

Here they stopped again for a moment's talk in low tones, and then they tried these two doors. They were not locked, and readily opened to their touch.

"I don't fancy that there's much show in here," said one of the men. "It does not look well got up for a hiding-place. I suppose, though, we'd best take a look inside."

They entered the two rooms. Here was the opportunity for which Bob had waited, and on which he had calculated as a possibility.

In an instant he slipped through the door of

Beau's room, and hurried along the entry, the light step of his stockinged feet making no sound upon the floor. The back of the officer was turned toward him as he slipped past the door of one of the rooms, and rapidly glided toward the stairs.

At this moment the officer came from the opposite room, calling out to his comrade:

"Nothing here, Phil. How does your hunt pan out?"

"Not worth shucks," came in a growl from the other room. "There's not a rat here."

Bob had paused in his quick flight, and stood pressed close against the wall of the shadowy passage, not ten feet from them. He held his breath, and stood in a crouching attitude, as if ready to make a tiger's leap upon them if discovered.

But, quite unconscious of the presence of a living being so near them, the officers never thought of looking back over the path by which they had just come. On the contrary, they walked forward to the other end of the passage and entered Beau Bink's room by the partly open door.

Bob Rockett remained alone in the passage, but how he was to escape was not so evident. It would be folly for him to make his way to the upper story. Very likely the rooms there were being already searched. But to go down the stairs was equally dangerous. He knew very well that the foot of the stairway was guarded. He stood for a moment in deep thought, and with something of the feeling of a caged fox.

But we must leave him in this difficult position for the present, surrounded by his enemies, and not knowing which way to turn to escape, and go back to trace the further movements of these enemies.

As we have seen, the announcement to Beau Bink that the crime with which the fugitive was charged was not robbery, but murder, had worked a marked revolution in the feelings of that worthy. He had been a thief and pick-pocket all his life, and was at any time willing to empty a pocket when opportunity offered. And yet, with all this, he was really soft-hearted, and would not have done a personal injury to a fly.

The very idea of murder was abhorrent to him. But the murder of Sally Crapper! one of his best friends, and a woman to whom he owed a thousand favors! That was too much. Had Bob Rockett been his twin-brother he would have turned against him on that score, and he put himself at the head of the officers with a touch of bloodhound ferocity.

Beau sprung hastily to the back door of his room, which he flung open, crying, in a loud voice:

"This way! The murderer went this way! Follow me!"

But a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder and drew him back into the room. He turned to encounter the keen gaze and cynical smile of the principal officer.

"Not so fast, my dear friend," said this latter, sarcastically. "Did you never hear of the hounds running past the fox's lair? Suppose you repress your enthusiasm a little, and we will go to work on our principle of 'slow and sure.' I prefer to begin by taking a look through this room."

"Oh, you would!" replied Beau, with equal sarcasm. "Go ahead, then. Your friends, here, tried that on, but maybe they left some holes or cracks without nosing them."

"That's true," answered one of the officers. "Our man is not here."

Without the slightest attention to these remarks, the sharp-eyed thief-taker looked around the room with one of those keen observations which nothing escapes. But the only hiding-place which the apartment afforded was the closet, as he quickly perceived, and he threw open the door of this and glanced within. It was a narrow opening, not more than a foot in depth, holding Beau Bink's very slim stock of clothes, but affording no hiding-place for a fugitive of Bob Rockett's dimensions.

"That is empty, at all events," remarked the officer, as he shut the door of the closet, and turned the key, which stood in the lock. "There's one hole closed to our fox," he continued, as he handed Beau the key. "Here's the way to your wardrobe, my friend. Lead on, now— But, stay. You, Joe, take your stand out here, on the landing at the head of the stairs. We will make a drive through the rear passages."

The group of men vanished from the room, by the two doors, leaving Beau Bink's apartment to emptiness and silence.

"You are losing time," cried Beau, with energy. "This way! He escaped by this door! The infernal murderer! Only let me get my hands on him! Here are two rooms. He may be in them."

"Not in both at once, I fancy," coolly replied one of the officers. "It is not two minutes since we searched them. They don't hold a mouse, much less a man."

The doors of these apartments still stood wide open, as their late searchers had left them. The suspicious leader of the party cast a quick glance into each.

"Are there any closets?" he asked.

"No."

"Lead on, then. I fancy our man is not there."

Reaching the back stairway the party divided into two, a part of them going down-stairs, the remainder up toward the fourth floor.

But the sentinel still stood at the bottom of this flight, on the second floor, where he had been stationed by his comrades. No one had passed him, he declared. Not a soul had come down that stairway.

Beau Bink, the leader of the searching party, and another officer, ascended the flight to the fourth floor.

"He talked about the skylight," remarked Beau. "But, if he's got onto that roof he's a gone sucker. It don't communicate nowhere. All the houses around are lower than this, you see."

An examination of the skylight quickly settled that question. It was firmly bolted down. Plainly, no one had escaped in that direction. The rooms of this upper floor were again searched, with the same result as before.

"Bob Rockett isn't a salamander, nor he isn't a witch as could make his way through a key-hole," exclaimed Beau. "But, where in the blue blazes he is, gets me. It ain't ten mortal minutes since I had my two eyes on him; and now he's gone like a whiff of smoke."

He scratched his head in a perplexed manner. Here was a mystery beyond his powers of guessing.

The leader of the police, a grim look on his face, led the way down the stairs. Here still stood the man he had left on guard. No one had passed him.

Beau flung open the door of his room. The officer pushed past him into the apartment.

"I am not satisfied about those two back-rooms," he said. "We passed them too easily." He was gone for a minute or two, but returned with a dissatisfied face.

"Nothing there," he announced.

"And nothing here," replied Beau, "except you want to look in the closet again. I don't calculate, though, that Bob Rockett could get them broad shoulders of his through the key-hole, even if he was a witch."

"I fancy not," said the officer, with a jerk at the locked door.

Beau felt in his pockets for the key. It was not there.

"Thought I heard something drop," he muttered. "It has gone through that rascally hole in my pocket, that I ought to had sewed up a month ago."

The officer turned upon his heel and led the way down-stairs. The lower part of the house was again searched, but as fruitlessly as before.

Beau scratched his head in deeper amazement than ever.

"He was here, I'll swear to that," he averred. "I'll be hanged if I thought Bob was such a cute sleight-o'-hander. I'd give a joint off my big toe to tell what's come of him."

The officer looked at him with deep distrust. He evidently put very little faith in Beau's professions.

"You knew Sally Crapper?" he asked.

"Known her? Why I liked that woman better'n I liked anybody else on this rolling world. She was a mighty good friend to me, now I tell you."

"Then you had best keep an eye open for her murderer. We will set a watch on this house, though he will hardly return here. But you know some of his haunts?"

"Nary a haunt," muttered Beau.

"It will be money in your pocket if you can put us on his track."

"The deuce, take your money!" cried Beau, angrily. "I ain't that kind of a joker as sells out their old friends for money. But, if he really had a hand in murdering Sally Crapper, I'd run him down worse than a bloodhound would a runaway nigger. Jist put that clear in my brain-pan, and I'm your boss."

A conversation ensued, in which the officer gave his reasons for this belief in Bob's guilt,

after which the baffled party discontentedly left the house, at a complete loss to understand how their prey could have escaped them.

Beau returned slowly to his room, deeply cogitating as he did so.

"I wouldn't believe that of Bob," he said to himself, as he raked the fire. "Any little job of crib-cracking he might be up to, for there ain't no sort of harm in that. What little folks lose they kin make up ag'in. But, when it comes to smashing in a woman's head! I'll be blessed if I know what sort of flesh and blood some folks is made of."

He raked vigorously at the fire.

"That officer's a cute chap," he continued. "By the way, what ever become of that key? I'm a donkey to put anything in that pocket till the hole's sewed up."

There was a quick, snapping sound behind him. He turned sharply around.

"Is this the key?" spoke a well-known voice.

There, just emerging from the open closet appeared the burly form of Bob Rockett!

To say that Beau was astonished would very poorly express his state of mind on perceiving this apparition.

He rose to his feet and backed slowly away as though he had seen a ghost, his eyes starting from their sockets, his hands extended as if to repel a terrible phantom.

"The deuce!" was the only sound that broke from his lips, as he turned and dashed for the door.

But Bob was too quick for him. In an instant he had him by the shoulder, and dragged him back into the center of the room.

"One whimper of alarm, and I'll burst in that blockhead skull of yours," cried the burly captor. "What has become of all your new friends, the police?"

"All gone," gurgled out the frightened fellow.

"And so you were going to turn on me, and sell me to them, eh?"

"Yes!" cried Beau, with sudden boldness.

"If you had a hand in murdering poor Sally Crapper, I'd blow on you if you was my grandfather."

"Come, come, old chap," remarked Bob, more mildly. "I thought you knew me too well to swallow such pap as that. I'm not a murderer yet, thank Heaven. And don't intend to set up in that line of business. Sit down here now, you old fool till I tell you all about it."

"But how did you ever get into that closet?" asked Beau, still looking at Bob as though he beheld some powerful magician, or one vested with supernatural power.

Bob laughed as he took his old seat beside the stove.

"Well, as long as the coast is clear, I will let you into that little secret, too."

CHAPTER III.

THE GARLANDS AT HOME.

FROM Beau Bink's dingy apartment, with its "cobweb hangings," to the interior of a stylish mansion on Fifth Avenue, and of a room hung with damask curtains, and furnished with the richest and most expensive upholstery, is a broad step, but we must ask the reader to take it with us.

The apartment in question is in the showy mansion of Mr. Garland, the wealthy President of the Provident National Bank; and the persons present are this gentleman, a white-haired, haughty, yet kindly-eyed relic of the last generation; his daughter, Grace Essex, a young, beautiful, and charming lady, who looks yet in the first bloom of youth, although she has been twice married; and his son-in-law, Paul Essex, an erect, well-formed, handsome young man, with the frankest, and most honest of faces.

She has been at the piano, rattling off the newest and most lively of melodies, with her devoted husband hanging over her with all the ardor of a young lover.

But a quick exclamation from her father, who is reclining in his easy-chair, busy over his evening paper, causes them both to turn toward him.

Her fingers still play a light roudade upon the keys as she calls out to her father:

"Why, what is the matter? No sudden fall in stocks, I hope? The bottom hasn't dropped out of anything, as it has such a fashion of dropping out in the mercantile world?"

Mr. Garland looked up with a disturbed expression, her light laughter calling up no smile to his serious visage.

"No, no, Grace, it has nothing to do with business. But—I vow I wouldn't have believed it of him! It is the most astonishing thing."

The paper had fallen from his hands to the floor. Paul sprung forward and picked it up.

"Nothing serious, I hope," as he ran his eyes quickly over the columns.

"It is that murder which took place last night. You read of it. That brutal slaughter of a woman in a disreputable quarter downtown. A most horrible business."

"But, father," cried Grace, leaving the piano and coming over to him, "why should that specially disturb you? Murders are, unfortunately, very common occurrences nowadays."

"It is not that, Grace," looking up into her eyes with a pitying glance. "It is not the woman—but you would never imagine who has been accused of her murder."

Paul had by this time found the paragraph which had so greatly disturbed the old banker.

"But what is he to us?" he asked, reading from the paper. "Michael Crapper, alias Rusty Mike, a well-known rough and burglar, who has already served several terms in the penitentiary. Why, it was he who was suspected of being concerned in that effort to drown you, Grace; that happiest of all failures."

"I remember," replied Grace, a shudder passing through her frame, as she rested her light hand upon her husband's shoulder. "Ah, Paul! one does not easily forget an adventure like that. I tremble yet at the very thought of it."

"But read on!" exclaimed Mr. Garland, impatiently. "Never mind that villain. He is fair food for the hangman, at any rate. But his accomplice."

Paul's eyes hastily ran down the remainder of the paragraph, and then the paper fell from his hands, as a light cry escaped his lips.

"Robert Rockett!" he exclaimed. "Why, every one supposed he was dead! He alive and accused of murder!"

"No, no!" came in shuddering tones from Grace's lips, as she backed off with eyes distended with horror. "Not he! Oh, it cannot be possible!"

"Yes, my dear," replied her father, folding his arm around her slender waist. "He is accused of being concerned with Rusty Mike in the murder of this woman, who, it seems, was Mike's wife."

"I do not believe it! There!" she spoke vehemently. "After all he has done for us, too! You do not credit it, father?"

"It seems incredible," rejoined her father.

"To think of all he has done. He saved my life when this Mike sought to drown me. He saved me from being kidnapped. You know that, Paul! And last of all he saved me from the crime of bigamy."

"I should like to know how?" asked her father.

He did his best to convince us that George Delorme, my former husband, was living. And suppose they had not tried to rob the bank—he would be still living; I would have been married, and oh, what a horrible affair that would have been! And then we know that the leader of the burglars struck him to the earth for trying to save Paul's eyes. Are we to thank him now by believing that he is a murderer?"

Her lips were white, her cheeks deathly pale, but her eyes glittered with feverish intensity.

"Come, come, my dear, you are too excitable," said Mr. Garland, soothingly. "Read the remainder of the paragraph, Paul. It may be a mere unfounded suspicion. I should be sorry enough to believe that there could be any foundation for such a charge."

He drew his daughter close beside him, and clasped his arms around her, as Paul resumed his reading.

"Two men were seen to leave the house before the murder was discovered," he remarked.

"One was known to be Mike Crapper. The other was a stranger. But the description given by the woman who saw him would answer exactly for Rockett," he continued, as he ran his eyes further down the paper. "Aha! this does look serious! A rough, well-worn overcoat was found in the room, with blood on its sleeves. In one of its pockets was a handkerchief stamped 'R. Rockett.' It also held a silver tobacco-case, with his name engraved on the inside of the lid." Paul shook his head doubtfully. "This, with the description of the man seen in company with Rusty Mike, certainly does look suspicious."

"It is not true!" cried Grace vehemently, starting from her father's arm. "There is some horrible mistake. He is incapable of such a crime, I know he is. You don't believe it, Paul?"

She laid her hands upon his arm, and looked up imploringly into his face.

"Believe it! Well, I don't have your faith in

the man, Grace, but I hardly think he is so bad as that. The circumstances look very dubious it is true, but it does not do to trust too much to circumstantial evidence."

"Is there anything more, Paul?" asked Mr. Garland, a doubtful look upon his handsome countenance. "Have any arrests been made?"

"No. That is another bad feature of the case. Rusty Mike has disappeared entirely. But the police had sure notice that Rockett was concealed in a house on Blair street, near the East River. This house was surrounded and searched from top to bottom. They had information from one of its inmates that the fugitive was in the house when they entered it. Yet, in some mysterious and unaccountable manner he escaped them. How he could have left the house through a cordon of policemen without being seen is certainly an extraordinary affair. Yet he seems to have done so."

"If he was conscious of innocence why should he seek to escape?" queried Mr. Garland. "I don't like the looks of that."

"Because he is like a hare pursued by the hounds!" exclaimed Grace. "You have set them on his track for that bank robbery, father. Although there is no proof that he had anything to do with it. And now some enemy has sought to place this murder at his door. No wonder the poor fellow seeks to escape. You know that you have no proof whatever that he was connected with those bank robbers."

"Except that he himself threatened me to do something of the kind."

"Is that proof?" she asked, turning suddenly toward him. "Do burglars thus advertise their purposes? Is that proof, Paul?"

"No, Grace. It seems to me rather in his favor."

"Thank you. Oh, I do wish that those robbers were arrested! I know that it would clear him of complicity."

"I declare," exclaimed Mr. Garland, "you are an earnest partisan, Grace. But I fear you are inclined to cling to your *protege*, right or wrong."

"And suppose I am? Think what he has done for me! I would despise myself to desert him now. If he is arrested and tried for this crime, father, you must see that he is defended. We owe that much to him."

"I will," Mr. Garland replied quietly.

"But how about that woman: that—person, whom George Delorme called his wife? She was suspected and watched! Has nothing been discovered?"

"Nothing positive. She has had a number of visitors, among them Roger Glendon. But then" he shrugged his shoulders. "She is a good-looking adventuress. Roger is a soulless adventurer. It may not be difficult to guess his purposes."

"I have no faith in him whatever," she coldly replied. "He would be equal to bank robbing, or any other enormity, in my opinion. —But has anything been discovered about that woman? Is it known who she is?"

"It is only known that Delorme brought her here from the West."

"Well, well, I don't know that I have need to care. The Delorme episode has gone out of my life. It matters little to me who she is. But I cannot help doubting Roger Glendon."

At a later hour that evening Grace accompanied her husband to the opera. A celebrated Italian company was giving a series of entertainments of the most attractive character, and the beauty and fashion of New York crowded the boxes and the seats of the opera-house, listening with attentive ears to the magnificent music which rung from the orchestra and the choruses, and fell in trickling gems from the lips of singers of world-wide fame.

For hours the vast audience was held spell-bound by the charming music of *Trovatore*, so richly rendered, and it was with a sigh at the breaking of the charm that Grace rose from her seat, and drew her opera-cloak around her.

The whole audience had risen, and was crowding toward the doors of the theater, in that crushing fashion usually seen, as if the saving of a minute now was a matter of life and death.

Up the long aisles Paul and Grace were borne as on the waves of an irresistible stream, and into the wide vestibule, which was thronged with the multitudes pouring out from the various doors, and down the wide stairways.

He touched her on the arm, and pointed over the sea of heads to a distant part of the vestibule.

"Yonder is an old friend of yours."

"I recognize no one," she answered. "Who is it?"

"Roger Glendon."

"Oh!" She had just then caught sight of the well-remembered face. "And see, Paul, he has a lady with him. Can it be—"

"George Delorme's associate? Who knows? Perhaps so. Though Roger has a multitude of lady friends."

"I wish I could see her face. She keeps it turned away."

"Oh! it cannot be as you suspect. He would hardly be so bold. Never mind her, Grace. Let us get out of this crush, and into our carriage."

Yet that was no easy matter. Step by step they slowly made their way to the door. The carriages were driving up and rapidly taking away a portion of the crowding host, while the great mass departed on foot to right and left, seeking the nearest street cars.

At length Mr. Essex's carriage was announced, and Paul and Grace made their way to the pavement. Just then there came a surge of a new mass from the door, causing a close jam on the outer steps of the opera-house.

Immediately in front of them they perceived the well-known form of Roger Glendon. There was a lady upon his arm, whom he seemed seeking to protect from the crush.

Paul and Grace were driven against them by the pressure from behind, which almost caused them to lose their footing on the steps.

"Pardon me," said Grace to the lady on Roger's arm, against whom she was roughly jostled. "I could not help it."

The person addressed looked around, with an angry light in her eyes.

For a moment the two were face to face, with a sudden pallor on each countenance, a repressed cry on their lips.

"Grace Garland!"

"Marie Ormiston!"

And then the surging crowd pushed between and separated them.

"Take me to the carriage, Paul," whispered Grace, as she hung tremblingly upon his arm. "The mystery is revealed. I feel as if I had seen a ghost, or a—serpent."

She could hardly support herself as he led her across the wide pavement to the carriage.

CHAPTER IV.

PLANNING AND COUNTERPLANNING.

WITHIN a large room of an extensive, but rather dingy edifice, in the lower portion of Manhattan Island, a group of men were gathered. The apartment was very sparsely furnished. A large desk in one corner, with pigeon-holes overflowing with papers, on which the dust of centuries seemed to have collected; a long, narrow table in the center of the room; and around it a half-dozen chairs, whose occupants could find no better resting-place for their feet than the surface of the table between them.

They were all smoking as industriously as if smoking was one of the essential duties of life, some performing this duty with the aid of well-browned meerschaum pipes, others content to take their tobacco in the humbler form of cigars.

One only of the group was otherwise occupied. He sat, with his feet crossed on the rounds of his chair, and leaned forward over the table, diligently examining a sort of map, which lay spread open before him.

It was the same person who had led the searching party at the house in Blair street, the result of which we have already described. The same cynical, distrustful smile rested upon his face, as he followed the lines of the map with his finger.

"We have pretty thoroughly used up the fellow's town haunts," he remarked. "To tell the truth, men, I didn't expect to find him in any of them. But the rule is, you know, to use up the likely places first, and try the unlikely places afterward. It is a confoundingly ridiculous rule, of course, and I calculate we're likely to find it so in this case. Now where are the most unlikely places for us to find Rusty Mike?"

"In the top of Trinity steeple," growled one, removing the pipe from his mouth.

"Taking an airing on the battery," suggested a second.

"Or a morning constitutional on the Mall in the Park," put in a third.

"At Grace Church, I should fancy," added a fourth. "Or maybe at the Italian opera. Mike had a taste for music."

"Go on, boys, if you think there is no hereafter," grumbled the first speaker. "The Scriptures say 'Answer a fool according to his folly,' and I certainly was a fool to expect a sensible answer from any of you. Now I'm de-

cidedly of the opinion that Mike has shaken the dust of the city from his feet."

"Emigrated to Arizona, perhaps."

"Or on a summer tour to Niagara Falls."

A laugh passed around the room, which seemed to vex the man with the map. His grizzled mustache twisted uneasily upon his lip as he looked up at his jesting companions.

"See here," he cried, with some fierceness of accent. "I didn't come to play the baby, or to crack jokes on the head of a murderer. When I lay myself out for business I mean business. If you want to play a game of wig-wag afterward I'll leave you a clear field."

The laughter was redoubled.

"But, what is your opinion, Foster?" asked one of the others. "It is very evident that we have none."

"I've a notion that our man has struck for Staten Island. He has hiding-places down that way. Down here, Joe. This is the route we followed when we tracked him after that last crib-cracking. Hereaways lies Jerry's caboose, where we nabbed him then."

"You don't calculate he's fool enough to follow the same track?"

"I'm talking about unlikely places," rejoined Foster, looking up. "It's more likely that he has struck down this way, near the shore. There are several doubtful places along that locality. Down here at Squintville, for instance. That is worth investigating. A pair of you can look through that ancient and most honorable metropolis of spoiled fish and odorous oysters. Here's your track, Joe. And this will be a fair field for you, Tom." He traced lines on the map with his finger as he spoke.

Removing the cigars from their lips the men bent over the table, curiously scanning the work laid out for them.

"But, what ground have you left for yourself?" asked one.

"I will try the unlikely places," he answered. "I sent a squad out into Jersey this morning and another up Long Island. But I've a notion that we've got the best ground. Two to one but we find him."

"And how about Bob Rockett?"

The sound that came from Foster's lips was very like an oath, as he dashed his hand vigorously upon the table.

"I'll be hanged if I ain't nonplused for one," he ejaculated. "Who would have thought that a greenhorn like that would be smart enough to throw our whole force astray? There's one thing, though, my boys, we haven't got his bearings yet. That's always one difficulty with a new hand. If it's an old stager we know all his whys and wherefores. He hasn't an earth but what some bound has had his nose at the hole. But the whole pack is astray with these new foxes. There's nothing for it but to follow their scent. We can't head them off."

"That's true," answered Joe, taking his pipe from his lips to make this remarkable observation.

"But about that affair in Blair street?" queried another. "I wasn't on that; but you were sure of your game there. How came it to fail?"

"Don't ask me," Foster shortly replied. "The chap must have felt the wind of our coming and made his escape. He was not there, that is sure. But we found that smirking rascal of a Beau Bink, and you never saw a pickpocket so confoundingly anxious to sell his old friends. There was something behind it all, I'll swear that; but hang me if I can make it out."

He picked up Joe's meerschaum from the table and took a long whiff.

"Have his other known resorts been searched?"

"Why, what in the sin do you take us for? Of course we've ferreted out every rat-hole and left an open trap everywhere for our man to walk in. The trouble of it all is, we haven't traced his old connections yet. He had some boyish associates who have turned out mighty dark sheep. It is these chaps we are trying to look up now."

"He may be in the Blair street den yet," suggested the one who had spoken before. "Wouldn't it pay to make an unexpected call in that quarter?"

"There's human nature again," Foster sarcastically replied. "If I'd only been there, you know, they wouldn't have shut my eyes up. I'd have seen through them. That's the old song that's been sung since the days of Adam. Why hang it all, man, do you fancy that I haven't got good eyesight? Go down and try it on for yourself, if you think so."

"No offense, Mr. Foster," replied the other, in a deprecating tone, "I only thought—"

"Of course you only thought. You think too much. Don't trouble yourself about that concern. The house is under strict guard. Nothing will get in or out very conveniently. I never do things by halves."

"But mayn't this be one of the unlikely places you spoke of?" asked Joe, with a laugh.

"Yes, most monstrously unlikely," rejoined Foster, as he folded up his map and replaced it in his pocket. "Come, gentlemen, we must to work. Rusty Mike is our game now. I will try and lay a parallel to corner up our sky-Rockett, when I can get my thinking organs in good working order."

There was then an immediate opening of closets, putting on of overcoats, (for the day was a chilly one, though it was late in the spring), and examining of weapons, with a small arsenal of which each officer provided himself.

In a few minutes more, all their arrangements perfected, they left the room, each to take his part, as laid out by their superior, in the search for Rusty Mike.

But we must return to that locality which Foster thought such a monstrously unlikely hiding-place for Bob Rockett—to the sumptuously upholstered apartment of which Beau Bink was so proud.

We left that well-satisfied householder in a state of surprise and alarm at the unexpected appearance of Bob Rockett from his locked closet.

Beau, with his tall lank figure half doubled up on his chair, sat staring in dismayed silence at his guest, utterly at a loss what to make of such a strange feat of metamorphosis.

He gave several nervous glances toward the door, and once partly rose, as if inclined to make a desperate break for freedom from his perilous neighbor.

Bob looked at him with a quizzical smile, as he displayed the butt of a pistol which rested in his breast-pocket.

"If you don't want a sudden and inexpensive funeral you'll stay where you are, my uneasy friend," he growled, cynically. "I'm a good-natured fellow, as folks go; but you might find it healthy to take my advice, and keep quiet."

Beau glared at him as a caged animal might look at the keeper who has mastered him.

"How long have you known me?" asked Bob.

"A matter of ten years, I reckon," answered Beau surlily.

"And did you ever know me to do a mean or a dirty trick?"

"N—no! I allers thought you was on the square, blast me if I didn't!"

"And yet you go back on your old friends the minute any rascally policeman chooses to hum in your ear. I'm ashamed of you, Beau Bink!"

"It looks thunderin' squally, anyhow," grumbled Beau.

"It's a lie, for all that, take my word for it," retorted Bob, half angrily. "That infernal coat looks bad, I'll admit that; and it's best for me to keep out of sight until I can show up how it got there. But as for helping to kill Sally Crapper, I'd have liked nothing better than to catch that black-muzzled hound at it. Hang me if there wouldn't have been a Rusty Mike the less in the world. Do you believe me, Beau?"

There was the true ring of sincerity in his voice. Beau looked at him dubiously.

"Was it you that left the house with Rusty Mike, after the murder?"

"Yes."

This was an unexpected answer. He had looked for a denial.

"Blame my eyes, Bob, if you aren't straight up and down, anyhow," exclaimed Beau. "Hang it all, I can't swaller it that you had any hand in that devilish business."

"If I had, Beau, I'd go hang myself. But I don't intend to let the authorities hang me for another man's work."

There was some admiration in Beau's fishy eyes as he looked again at his companion.

"How did you fling them policemen?" he asked, curiously. "That's jist the neatest job I ever heered on. How did you come inter that closet?"

"You had better sew up the holes in your pocket," laughed Bob.

"Yes, I know that key dropped through. But blame me if you didn't somehow push through a smaller hole. It jist gits me."

"Do you remember when those two men came into your room?"

"I sartainly do."

"Well, that settled the whole job. I was just then squeezed against the wall of the entry, as

tight as a shadow against a brick wall. They had searched the two rooms out there, you know. But as soon as their backs were turned I slipped into one of those rooms. I knew it wasn't safe to try the stairs, except I wanted to drop from the frying-pan straight into the fire."

"But the officers searched them rooms twice afterwards," cried Beau, in surprise.

"Only once," replied Bob, positively. "The first time they only looked in at the open door. If that sharp-eyed chap had taken a squint behind the door then, I am afraid it would have been all up with my bacon. I was looking out at him through the crack of the door, and just wondering what was the next card to play, when he was kind enough to carry his ugly phiz out of sight."

"Laws bless us!" ejaculated Beau, in admiration. "That was a narrer squeak."

"The rest was all plain sailing," continued Bob. "After they had passed, I slipped out, picked up your key, which I saw shining on the floor, and, as I had happened to hear that little confab about your closet door, I saw my way clear as sunlight. I slipped in here, locked myself in the closet, and laughed in my sleeve at the whole party of you."

Beau started up and clapped his hands.

"Well, if you ain't a cool one I'll be blowed. Why, if I'd done sich a thing I'd 'a' shivered down clean inter my boots, when the officers come back."

"I ain't that kind," answered Bob coolly.

Beau sat and stared at him for several minutes, as if not quite knowing what to make of him.

"I guess maybe you kin hide about here till dark," he muttered. "And then you mought slip out unbeknowns. I s'pose you've got a hiding place laid out?"

"Yes," answered Bob quietly.

"Where?"

"Here."

Beau stretched his lank figure to its utmost height, and looked down in utter astonishment on his strange visitor.

"Here?"

"Yes. I guess you can make it comfortable for me."

"But goodness gracious, man, are you goin' clean daff? Why you mought as well take up your quarters in the police court at once."

"That's a good idea, Beau. Perhaps I will next," answered Bob, as he stretched himself out in his chair, thrust his hands deeply into his pockets and looked quizzically at his astounded host.

"But the idear of your bunkin' here. Why they'll nab you afore you could say Jack Robinson."

"You old fool," Bob curtly answered; "haven't you wit enough to see that this is just the best hiding place in the whole city of New York? Do you generally get in front of a man's track to escape him, or behind it?"

"Behind it."

"Well, that is just what I am doing. The police have been past here. They will not come back this way. Do you imagine that I am idiot enough to put myself in front of them again? I don't calculate that they will double back on their trail, so I guess I will bunk with you for a while."

Beau groaned as he gazed at his visitor. He was not altogether pleased with this idea.

"But I am as hungry as a wolf, my boy. Can't you get me up a trifle of dinner?"

"I ain't got nothing in the house," muttered Beau. "Jist you hang on here, and I'll go out and scure up something."

"Come back here, you blunder-headed old rogue! None of that!" roared Bob. "I like you too well to lose sight of you. There's a boy I saw on the floor below who looked as if he might be a sharp young rat for an errand. Suppose you just whistle him up."

Utterly defeated Beau proceeded to obey orders, Bob keeping a keen eye upon his every movement.

CHAPTER V.

AN UNEXPECTED MOURNER.

At a rural cemetery, a few miles north of the city of New York, a grave had been opened in a neglected corner of the grounds, and the grave-digger and his assistant were waiting in stolid patience for the coming of the expected occupant of this humble sepulcher.

The old man sat on the corner of a broad marble slab, which recounted the virtues of some long dead individual who lay below. His hands grasped the handle of his spade, on the

top of which rested his chin, while his bleared eyes were fixed with curious interest on the face of his companion.

The latter, a much younger man, leaned against a tall tombstone, his lips busily mulling over the tobacco which he had plunged within his cavernous jaws. He rubbed his partly-bald poll with a slow movement as he talked in a drawling tone.

"Poor gal! I knowed her parients as well as I knowed my own," remarked the old man, in a wheezy voice. "She were a prime good gal, too; but everybody said, when she married that good-for-naught, as she'd jist flung herself away."

"That's how they're a-burying of her out hereaway then?"

"Zackly, 'zackly. She b'longs in these yere diggin's. As fur that Mike Crapper, I knowed it. I allers said it, as my old woman can tell ye. He was a sort o' fressh-lookin', spry feller in them days; but any fool could see that he had bad born in him."

"We're allers so good in seein' that, arter a man's brung to the gallows," mumbled the other.

"But you go on, Toby. I didn't want to interrupt you. So the poor critter was found with her head smashed in, eh?"

"Clean smashed," answered Toby, with a sigh. "You see it were this-a-way. Rusty Mike hed many and many a scrimmage with his wife, so the nebbors say, in the which he'd cuss away like a water-wheel in full blast, an' she scurse say her life were her own. Well, this day he'd been a-cussin' like a fifty hoss runaway ingine, and Sal got her dander up and gi'n him as good as he sent. They could hear it over the whole house, an' some o' the folks would ha' put the'r oar in, on'y he was sich a rascally ugly divil to deal with. So they kept mum."

"Wish I'd a-bin there," mumbled the old man, over his spade.

"S'pose you had, you old jockey; what'd you ha' done?" asked Toby, satirically. "The idea of a rotten old log o' wood like you meddlin' with sich a rough as Rusty Mike. Well, ther comes a heavy tumble, and then a hollow groan, and then all was still. Some of the folks did run down then, but there stood Mike outside his door, a-glowerin' on 'em, and askin' what the blazes they wanted meddlin' atween a man and his wife? They say that ther was pale rings round his eyes, but he looked so black and stormy-like that they all backed off, arter some on 'em had gi'n him a piece o' the'r minds."

"And was she a-layin' there murdered all that time?" asked the old man, with trembling interest.

"I'm comin' to that. Ain't a-goin' to shove on the story too rapid, fer fear it won't hang out. Anyways ther weren't any more noise, and folks went about the'r own bizness, 'specting that it didn't come to nothin'. In them diggin's, ye know, it weren't a very unusual matter to silence a woman's tongue by a tap alongside the head."

"Jist so," muttered the old man. "There's times they need it. I'd tried it on my own old 'oman more an' onst, on'y she's ginerally too spry, and gi'ns me the tap fust. She's a rantankerous critter, is that old 'oman o' mine."

"Anyhow, an hour arter," continued Toby, "some of the nebbors see'd Mike streakin' away from the house, like a hang-dog as he is. He hed with him another chap as the papers thinks is a coon they call Bob Rockett. Them two were twigg'd leavin' the door o' the house together. Well, mebbe an hour, mebbe two hours arter, when a good woman o' the 'stablishment was a-comin' along the entry, what should she see but a little red line that looked like blood, a-runnin' from under Mike's door."

"The good Lord guide us!" exclaimed the old man, holding up his hands in horror.

"You kin bet ther was a time," resumed Toby. "That woman lets out a yell that brung the hull house down in the shake of a cow's ear. The door was locked, but locks weren't nowhere afore that crowd. They jist bu'sted it in quicker'n lightnin'. An' sich a sight as there were afore them! Nobody never see'd the like."

Toby fell into gloomy silence, and commenced to bite at a bunch of grass, which he had pulled up from the grave mound.

The old man's hands shook with excitement as he let fall the spade. He sprung up and caught Toby by the shoulder, shaking him violently.

"That's jist like you, Toby Blake. What was it they seen? Tell me now, or I'll brain you with the spade."

Toby laughed at the assault of his veteran comrade. But he resumed his story.

"There laid the cold corpse of poor Sally Crapper. Stone dead, and with a hole in her head you could ha' put yer fist in. The woman had bin hit with a heavy bludgeon, with a knob on the end as big as a cocoanut. Well, it smashed in her skull, that's all. Mike hed lifted her onto the bed, but ther was a pool o' blood on the floor, that come tricklin', tricklin' along, till it crept out under the door, jist like—"

"Jist like the finger of God pointing out the murderer!" broke in the old man excitedly.

"The bloody cut throat!" continued Toby. "Ther weren't never no good in him. But there were a pair of 'em, fur that matter. They found this Bob Rockett's coat a-hangin' over a cheer-back in the room, with his han'kercher and his tobacco-box in the pockets. If they both don't git the'r necks stretched then ther's no justice in the land, and a couple o' bloody villains 'll go scot free."

"That's what you thinks of it, you bald-headed fool!" came a hoarse voice behind them, causing them to spring up and turn around with startling haste.

There stood a tall, burly fellow, dressed in rough frieze, his coat buttoned to his chin, his bony, embrowned, ferocious face covered with a stubby beard of a week's growth, while the matted hair that hung over his eyes was filled with bits of hay, revealing the nature of his lodgings of the previous night.

The grave-diggers gazed at this apparition, which had emerged from behind a tall grave-stone, with starting eyes, while they showed an inclination to back away from such a dangerous neighborhood.

"Mike Crapper!" ejaculated the old man.

"Rusty Mike!" exclaimed Toby, his sinewy fingers knotting themselves around the handle of his spade.

"None of that now," came in fierce tones from Mike. "I've got a little bit of a persuader yere in my pocket, and I'd like the pair o' ye to bear in mind that foolin' won't pay round these diggin's."

He drew from his pocket a huge, old-fashioned revolver, which he cocked with a click like that of a musket.

"It ain't none o' yer funny nic-naes," he sourly remarked. "But don't you go foolin', that's all."

"What brings you here?" cried Toby.

"Tain't out o' the way fur a man to tend his wife's funeral, I calkerlate," growled Mike, ferociously.

"Why didn't you think of that afore you murdered her?" asked the old man, with sturdy indignation.

"Cos I never murdered her," answered Mike, stolidly. "Why, Sally Crapper was the only critter I loved in the world. It was Bob Rockett snagged her, blast him, and now they're a-tryin' to lay the whole thing on me. 'Spect they'll hang me fur it too, if they nab me. See here, boys, yer ain't got no 'jection to a poor feller takin' a last look on his wife?"

There was a sort of pathos in Mike's tone. The two men looked at each other for a moment, and then answered.

"It's human, I s'pose, and I wouldn't be a Christian to stand ag'in' that," was the old grave-digger's comment.

"And hang me if I'd stand in the way of a dog, in sich a case as that," exclaimed Toby energetically. "See here, Mike. We'll gi'nye time for a look, and then let ye git outside the grave-yard wall. But arter that it's pull Dick, pull devil. Ye've got to trust to yer own legs arterwards."

"Very well," answered Mike. "That's all I ask."

Certainly the few days which had elapsed since the murder had made a marked change in his appearance. The bold and somewhat brutal ferocity of his ordinary bearing had given way to a hang-dog look, and something of the furtive expression of a cornered fox, who feels himself almost in the power of enemies hungering for his life.

There might have been also, some glimmer of remorse in the look that dwelt upon Mike's face, if such a soul as his was capable of that feeling.

At this moment he gave a start as if a knife had been plunged deep into his flesh, while an unearthly pallor spread over his countenance. He had indeed been struck; but in his soul, not in his flesh. It was the single, thrilling, loud-vibrating tone of a bell which had struck the murderer to the heart, the first peal of the church-bell tolling over the corpse of his slain wife.

Again came that thrilling peal. Mike, with a face working with some deep feeling, pressed his hands firmly over his ears, and backed step

by step away, as if every deep clang of the vibrating bell struck him to the soul.

"Ah, stop it!" he cried in a tone of deep emotion. "May the fiends take the fool that's at that bell!"

An opera-goer would have been reminded of the similar experience of Mephistopheles, in the play of Faust. But the grave-diggers had no impression but that of a soul moved by remorse and they looked with a feeling of pity upon the miserable man.

But the funeral cortege was entering the cemetery. It wound through the narrow gateway in front of the low church, and by a devious way among the graves toward the retired corner where poor Sally Crapper's grave had been dug.

The procession was of some length. The friends of the deceased in the city were too poor to be able to follow her remains to this rural situation, but many of her youthful acquaintances still lived in this neighborhood, and the whole district around had been excited by the news of the murder, and crowded to behold the obsequies of the poor slaughtered woman.

Step by step as the procession filed past the church, the bell tolled out its dismal tidings of death, and the miserable, crouching husband pressed his hands more tightly over his ears, while his whole frame seemed to writhe with agony.

The grave reached they gathered thickly around it, while the grave-diggers, with hands that involuntarily trembled, proceeded to lower the plain coffin into the narrow excavation. They could not but think of the man crouched out there behind that tall, marble slab.

But the tolling bell had ceased its lugubrious peal, and the clergyman proceeded with the funeral service, the cortege gathering reverently around. On the outer edge of the throng stood a man that seemed to those who noticed him to be some road tramp, whom the sight of the procession had drawn within the cemetery.

Little notice was taken of the intense eagerness with which he seemed to listen to the service, nor did any one observe the writhing expression of his features as the falling clods from the hands of the grave-digger rattled upon the wooden top of the coffin. This hollow sound seemed to strike him yet more deeply than the peal of the tolling bell.

A few minutes more and the procession again began to move, walking in to the grave and taking its last look upon the outer covering of the corpse that lay below.

Solemnly the mourners moved on, gathering again around the grave after passing it and observing those who followed. What was their surprise to behold, at the extreme end of the procession, the ill-looking, disreputable, tramp-like individual whom many of them had already observed. He walked slowly up with downcast head, the grave-diggers drawing back as if from contamination, as he approached.

He bent long over the grave, while those nearest to him fancied they saw the glitter as of a tear in his eyes. Whispers passed through the throng. Who could this man be? Some old acquaintance? Perhaps some former lover of the deceased? She had lived so long among questionable characters, that she might well have made strange acquaintances.

A moment more, and then, lifting his head and gazing with a gloomy, somewhat defiant expression upon the surrounding throng, he walked slowly away.

He left the locality of the grave and walked to the further side of the cemetery, followed by a hundred curious eyes.

Toby nudged his older companion. "We was to give him past the wall," he whispered. "I'll swow if he ain't a-goin' to make fur the furthest wall he can find."

"Looks like it," was the sententious answer. The eyes of the assembly followed him as he commenced to climb the low wall.

"Who in the world is he?" asked one of them. "Does any body know?"

"Yes." It was Toby Blake who answered. "Ha! who is he, then?" came in a dozen curious voices.

Toby kept silent for a minute, during which the fugitive rested upon the wall, looking back toward the crowd that surrounded the grave. Then he leaped down to the ground outside.

"It's Rusty Mike!" roared Toby, suddenly. "It's Mike Crapper! It's the murderer! We promised not to blow on him till he was out of the grave-yard. He's got his start now! After him, men! After him!"

Flinging down his spade, Toby leaped across the adjoining grave, and started in furious flight after the escaping murderer.

His thrilling cry had rung like a trumpet-call in the ears of all present, and every man, and half the women, rushed at full speed after him, a medley of cries, shouts, and imprecations breaking the former decorous quiet of the scene.

In a minute or two more the mass of the pursuers were over the wall of the yard, and had disappeared to the eyes of those about the grave. Toby still led in the chase.

With a sigh the old man resumed his spade, and flung a spadeful of dirt in upon the coffin.

"The time was when I'd been first in such a chase myself," he muttered. "But my old bones is getting stiff. And somehow, for all he's such a villain, I'd like to see the man git off this bout. There was a somethin' solemnifying about his behavior."

He commenced to shovel the dirt into the grave, the rattle of clods upon the coffin forming a strange accompaniment to the cries of the pursuers of the flying murderer.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW HARRY TODD TOOK BOB ROCKETT.

HE was a little, blue-eyed fellow, but he looked as sharp as a first-class steel-trap. His jacket had been made for a person twice his size, and hung on him as limply as an overcoat on a bean-pole, while it was as thoroughly ventilated as though it had done duty as a sieve.

A cap without visor was pulled desperately down over his straggling locks; and one might have thought that his clothes had been flung at him, and stuck wherever they happened to fall, to judge by his happy-go-lucky aspect.

Yet little all this troubled Young America as he went whistling along, swinging a basket in his hand, in which were a loaf of bread and other articles of food.

"Hey, youngster. Been early to market this morning, eh?"

The boy looked around. The man who addressed him was a long-faced individual, who was lounging carelessly by his side. The lad examined him from head to foot with a scrutinizing glance.

"I don't know as you sent me," he answered impudently. "So you needn't get on yer ear about it."

The boy went whistling on, as if he had settled the whole question.

"See here, you cross-grained rag-picker," cried the man angrily. "Is that the way you expect to get through the world, giving impudent answers to every civil question?"

"I expect to git along tendin' to my own bizness," rejoined the boy.

He changed his tune, and walked independently on, whistling "Little Buttercup" with a rollicking air.

The man laughed, and caught the boy by the shoulder.

"Say, my young coon, don't you want to make a quarter this morning?"

"Guess so," and the boy lost the thread of his tune in his sudden interest. "Wouldn't go back on makin' a dollar if there weren't too much hard work in it."

"It is only to answer a civil question. You live in that house?" pointing to a neighboring edifice.

"Kinder," answered the boy. "When I ain't in the street."

"Isn't there a Mr. Bink lives there?"

"If you wait I'll go and ask my daddy. Ain't sure myself."

"Here's your quarter," remarked the man, showing the silver piece promised.

"That sorter helps my memory," rejoined the boy. "Now I come to think on it there is sich a chap there."

"Isn't it he that you are doing the marketing for?"

"Kinder," answered the boy.

"He is getting rich, I suppose, that he hires an errand-boy?"

"He's a regular Vanderbilt," replied the keen young rogue. "Guess his uncle's pegged out and left him a fortune. Good-by; 'cept you've got another quarter to invest."

"No," laughed the man, "I'm afraid I've wasted my first. Toddle ahead, my little son, Mr. Bink mus' be waiting for his dinner."

"He won't starve," replied the boy. "It's a clean waste of good victuals to pour them down sich a hollow fence-rail."

Striking again into "Little Buttercup," the boy went whistling away, swinging his basket like the pendulum of a town-clock.

The man who had been questioning him lounged across the street, and toward the neighboring corner, where he accosted a person who

was negligently leaning against the sign of a cigar shop.

"He's there."

"Sure?"

"I'll go a high wager on it. Anyhow, I'm going to prove the pudding. I didn't care to question the boy too close, but when a fellow like Beau Bink takes to hiring an errand-boy, there's a screw loose somewhere. Foster laughed at the idea, but he'll feel cheap if I take his bird."

It was the man who had proposed another search of the Blair street house, during the meeting at the police office.

Meanwhile the boy had entered that establishment, whistling louder than ever as he crossed the doorway.

But his tune suddenly ceased as soon as he was fairly inside. Flinging the basket upon his shoulder he shot up the stairs like an arrow, and in a minute had flung open the door of Beau Bink's apartment, and entered that boasted domicile.

That self-satisfied householder was seated in a doubled-up attitude back of the stove, gazing furtively at his unwelcome companion, who had tilted his chair back against the wall, and was smoking away in the most nonchalant manner conceivable.

But they both made a hasty movement at this abrupt entrance of the boy, Beau rising so suddenly that his chair toppled over on the floor.

"What the blazes ails you, comin' in in that fashion?" he angrily asked.

"'Cause why, it's 'bout time to be gittin' up and gittin'." rejoined the lad, as he upset the basket on the table, pouring out its contents indiscriminately. "Ther's a peeler outside. I know the cut of his jib. He's been axin' me all sorts of imperdent questions. He didn't git much, though, 'cept street sass."

"The devil take you!" cried Bob, springing up and seizing the boy by the shoulder. "I'll bet a cow you've let the cat out of the bag."

"Nary," answered the boy, defiantly. "But if you know which side yer bread's buttered, you'll git, instanter. The bottom's dropped out, and that's the whole jig of it."

"Why, Top," said Beau, in alarm, "I hope you haven't told any yarns? This gentleman is only my cousin, from Chicago."

"All right," rejoined the boy, with his tongue in his cheek. "That's a mighty neat dodge. But the perlice weren't here t'other day for nothin', you bet. I kalkerlate yer cousin had jist best make streaks for Chicago ag'in', and put out like greased lightnin' at that. I ain't no fool—now you bet on that, too."

He walked independently from the room, the two men continuing to gaze with some alarm at each other.

"The jig's up," growled Bob.

"You'd best do as the boy says—streak it," suggested Beau.

"Yes, with a hook. This is the frying-pan, maybe, but I ain't Jack enough to jump square into the fire."

"You ain't goin' to stay here?" in alarm.

"Why, the weather is getting hot about here," answered Bob, in his quiet way. "But it's boiling just now out of doors. I'll wait till it cools down a bit."

He nonchalantly resumed his seat and his pipe, laughing at Beau, as that disturbed individual roamed the apartment like one in a frenzy.

"I wish Old Nick had you!" he cried. "What brung you here anyways? I was a-livin' ever so quiet and neat, and here you comes to git me into trouble. I'd give five hundred dollars, if I had that much to spare, to git you clean out of this."

"Your bid isn't high enough, my boy. I wouldn't go just at this minute for five thou sand."

Beau flung himself upon his chair, and dug his fingers into his matted hair, as if half beside himself with anxiety.

But he looked up again in renewed alarm on hearing a hasty step outside the room. The next minute the door flew open, and the long-faced individual who had accosted the boy stalked into the room.

His eyes fell upon the frightened proprietor of the apartment, who sprung up hastily at this abrupt entrance, and came eagerly forward with affected politeness.

"Good-mornin', sir; good-mornin'. Want to see anybody particular?"

"Yes," answered the man, curtly. "I want to see—"

"Me, maybe?"

It was the voice of Bob Rockett. The intruder turned hastily toward the side of the

room. But he started back in alarm as his eyes fell upon the sturdy figure of Bob, still tilted back in his chair, and with the pipe between his lips. But his right hand held a cocked revolver, whose sights bore with a dead aim on the intruder's head.

"Glad to see you," drawled Bob, taking the pipe from his mouth, and puffing out a volume of smoke. "I'm at home you see. Most always at home to my friends. Take a seat."

"But—" stammered the man, still backing off.

"Take a seat," there was an alarming significance in the click of the pistol lock.

The intruder hastily seated himself.

"You are on the police force, I take it.—Come, don't be handling that pocket. This weapon is rather quick on the trigger. Hands up!"

The man hesitated and stammered out some confused words.

"Hands up, I say!"

Up went the hands of the discomfited officer, who had fancied that it would be a glorious thing to take Bob Rockett single-handed. He had hoped to win great reputation by the exploit. But the tables seemed somehow to have turned.

"You want to see Bob Rockett?"

"Ye—yes."

"That's my name," Bob replaced the pipe between his lips. "Will you be kind enough to hand over your handle?"

"My handle?"

"Yes. Your cognomen. Your name, if you want plain English."

"Harry Todd," replied the officer, writhing under the dangerous look of Bob's pistol.

"Very good. Being's we've exchanged names, suppose we change hats and coats. I feel like being friendly and sociable."

A whiff of smoke from Bob's lips went curling up toward the ceiling. He looked aggravatingly cool as he continued to lean back, with his feet upon the front round of his chair.

"You murdering hound, let down that pistol!" yelled the alarmed officer.

"Softly, softly; no calling of names. And you needn't raise your voice. I can hear without that. Off with that coat!"

Bob evidently meant it. The officer hesitated a moment, but that threatening pistol took a more deadly slant toward his head. There was nothing for it but to obey. With a curse he flung his coat and hat to the floor. His hand reached toward his pistol pocket.

Bob clicked the pistol lock again, by way of a gentle reminder.

"Hands up!" he cried.

The discomfited officer obeyed with a groan of dismay.

Bob's next orders caused him to reseat himself, and double his wrists behind the chair back.

"There's a chance for you now, Beau. Tie this gentleman's hands."

Beau hung back doubtfully.

"Tie them, I say, or I'll treat you to a leaden pill, too."

At this fierce threat Beau hastily sought the necessary materials in his closet, and proceeded to obey Bob's peremptory order.

"Tie him fast to the chair now. Tight, mind you. No half-way tricks on me, if you value your skin."

In five minutes the unhappy officer was bound hand and foot to the chair rounds.

"I hope you'll enjoy it here. Mr. Bink and I have some business out. I'm rather afraid you'll find it lonesome. Oh! I forgot that you might take a fancy to talk to yourself, which wouldn't be healthy. Beau, my good fellow, just put a bit of something around Mr. Todd's mouth, so that he can't catch cold in his teeth."

A deep oath came from the prisoner's lips. He would have yelled for help if he had dared, but that dangerous weapon was too near his head.

In a minute more a suffocating thickness of flannel was tied around the lower part of his face, hardly giving him the opportunity to breathe.

"Try and enjoy yourself," said Bob mockingly. "I'd lend you my pipe but I hardly think you're in the humor for smoking. No matter. There'll be somebody along here in a day or two to let you out. Just keep cool till then. Come ahead, Beau, I want your company."

He had thrown off his own coat and hat, and assumed those of the prisoner as he spoke.

"Me!" cried Beau, despairingly.

"Yes, you, you bound! Do you fancy I am going to leave you here to set the dogs loose on

my track? Come on, now, I'm not in the mood for fooling."

With a gesture of dismay to the bound officer Beau followed his peremptory guest from the room, locking the door behind him, at Bob's stern command.

In a few minutes afterward the man in front of the cigar store saw two persons leave the suspected house and advance toward him. One of them he knew as Beau Bink. But who was this other, in semi-official uniform who held that worthy so firmly by the arm? He certainly was a very different figure from the person who had so lately entered that mansion.

"Understand," growled Bob fiercely in Beau's ear, "if you try to make trouble your house goes down first. Take that in."

He walked directly toward the person who was so intently regarding him, dragging Beau after him.

Bob turned to this man with a knowing wink.

"We thought it best to nab this one," he remarked, pointing with his thumb to Beau. "I left Harry Todd on the watch. The chap's there yet we think, but he must have some rascally close hiding-place. However, Harry is going to take this gentleman's place and the rat may be coaxed out of his hole."

Bob laughed as he turned to go on.

"I didn't know there were two of you," remarked the man addressed.

"Yes, I took the back way in. Harry and I had the trap laid, but bless you, our rat didn't walk in!"

A comical smile marked Bob's face as he pinched Beau's arm warningly. There was a growing doubt in the man's look.

"I don't know you," he answered.

"And I don't know you, so we're quits on that," Bob coolly replied.

"Hang me if you don't look like Bob Rockett himself."

"Yes. That's what our boys on the force say," laughed Bob. "It's a blasted uncomfortable likeness."

At this moment there came a tremendous yell from the upper part of the suspected house. It was followed by a succession of loud cries, and a fall as if a chair and its occupant had overturned.

"Harry's got him!" screamed Bob. "There's the devil to pay there! Come, there's help wanted."

The man to whom he was talking followed Bob in his flight toward the house. He even distanced him, and entered the house in advance. Bob, in fact, did not enter the house at all, but kept on down the street, as if he had important business in another direction. He was by no mean anxious to go to the rescue of Harry Todd, who had in some way got rid of his gag, and given the alarm.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE GARLAND MANSION.

PAUL ESSEX and his young wife were seated together in the sitting-room of Mr. Garland's city mansion. He was partly reclined in an easy-chair, she being on a low stool beside him, holding his hand in hers, and gazing up into his face with a look of warm trust and affection.

Yet a look of half dismay came over her face as a new thought passed through her brain. She puckered her pretty mouth, and bit at her finger in a most distracted fashion.

"Why what is the matter, sweet?" asked Paul, laughingly. "Nothing out of gear with any of our mutual bows or furbelows, I hope?"

"Hardly," she replied. "I am not one to take that sort of thing to heart. Why, you give twice the thought to the set of a necktie that I do. You know that, you rogue. Men are always talking of women's whims, yet they have twice as many themselves."

"Ah, mercy! I didn't know that I was drawing the fire of a masked battery on myself. Let me off this time and I won't refer to furbelows again. But what is it, then, that ails my Grace?"

Her laughing eyes grew serious in their expression.

"It is that woman. I cannot get her out of my thoughts, Paul. To think of my meeting her in that strange way, after so many years."

"She is a cousin of yours, you say?"

"I disown the relationship. To think that that woman tried to murder me, and that I owe my life to this young Rockett! How strangely all these things have become mixed up, Paul."

"There is one thing which I can't help thinking of," he answered.

"What is that?"

"That I would never have known you only for that attempted murder, and for Rockett's

bringing you to my mother's house to be taken care of."

She pressed his hand and looked up lovingly into his face.

"We owe something to both of them," she said. "It is strange how often the worst intentions work out good. I should prefer to pay no heed to that miserable woman, but my father is not troubled with any such feelings of sentiment. He seems determined to proceed against her. I wish he would not."

"But he has another reason for it, Grace. She undoubtedly knows who were engaged in that bank-robbing enterprise, and may be frightened into revealing their names. I have my own ideas about that. Ideas, of course, are not evidence, but I could swear that it is to Bob Rockett that I owe my eyesight."

"And yet you cherish ill will against him. That is not generous."

"No. It is the others I wish to bring to justice. Their cold-blooded leader, about whom also I have my suspicions. As for Rockett I fear that he is in far more serious danger."

"You don't believe that he was connected with that horrible murder, Paul?"

"I would like to not believe it. But it looks black for him, Grace. Very black."

"I don't believe it, at any rate!" she energetically replied, springing up and walking the floor excitedly. "And I'm ashamed of you for doing so. After all he has done for us—for both of us—I wish you would not talk so, Paul. Men who save people's lives, and try so hard to prevent them from committing unconscious crimes, are not the kind of men who murder poor, helpless women. To think of what we owe to him, and then of your repaying him with such suspicion!"

"Well, well, he has one earnest advocate, at all events," laughed Paul, as he seized his wife's hands and again drew her down on the stool beside him. "I hardly think he is capable of it, love. I think there must be some horrible mistake. If he be put on trial for this murder I certainly shall give my evidence in his favor."

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" she excitedly cried, springing up and kissing him. "You don't know how deeply I feel for him. But when I think that I owe him a life—"

"And I that I owe him a wife," broke in Paul, returning her kiss with warm interest. "My debt is the deepest, for you are more than life to me. You are right. We are deeply in debt to Bob Rockett. We must defend him to our utmost."

Their conversation was at this point interrupted by the hasty entrance of Mr. Garland. He was flushed and excited. He waved a newspaper in his hand with a strange gesture.

"Well, this beats all!" he exclaimed, with such emphasis that his two auditors sprang up in earnest attention.

"Why, what has happened?" cried Paul.

"The most daring and bare-faced thing! Two of the most daring things, in fact. I do not see what our police service is coming to. To let themselves be hoodwinked in this ridiculous manner! Out on such a city government!"

"Why, my dear father," exclaimed Grace. "I never saw you in such a way. What is it that has happened?"

"To think of a murderer attending the funeral of his murdered wife, and then walking off freely in the face of a hundred persons! I doubt if such a piece of bare-faced daring was ever perpetrated before!"

"Who?" asked Paul, hastily. "Not this Mike Crapper?"

"Yes. He walked up boldly among the mourners and looked into the grave, just as any grieving husband might have done. Nobody knew him, it seems, except the grave-diggers, and they had promised to let him get out of the graveyard again before they gave the alarm. A piece of ridiculous sentiment."

"I don't think so," replied Grace, to whom there seemed something touching in the circumstance. "Affection and remorse must have drawn the murderer there."

"Did he escape?" asked Paul.

"Yes. There was a piece of woodland not far from the cemetery. Into this he plunged. He was pursued by fifty men, but managed to give them all the slip. It was a rough, rugged piece of woods, and very extensive. No doubt was full of hiding-places which the villain knew. At any rate they searched for him until dark, and set up a strict watch on the woods after night. But he has somehow given them the slip. The whole country around is being scoured for him."

"Well, he certainly is a bold one," exclaimed Paul, with deep interest. "But he certainly

cannot escape. Why, every avenue will be guarded. There will be thousands on the look out."

Grace looked as if she hoped that he would escape. There was a touch of human feeling in his action which had roused a sympathetic chord in her warm heart.

"But the other?" she suddenly cried. "You said there were two of these bold escapes."

"The other was that of Robert Rockett. That was still more daring and impudent. Why, he has played with the police to their very noses."

"Oh, do tell us about that," exclaimed Grace, with redoubled interest.

Bob Rockett had certainly a strong partisan in her.

"You remember about the police searching a house for him a day or two ago? Well, it appears that he was there all the time, concealed in some unknown hiding-place. And he continued to stay there after the police left. One of these worthies suspected that there might be something wrong, and returned to that house to look for him. What should he find but our Master Rockett, as large as life, perched against the wall, and smoking away for dear life, as though he had not a care in the world! There is no telling to what lengths impudence may go."

"I declare!" cried Paul and Grace in concert. "It was bold. Did the policeman take him?"

"No; but he took the policeman, which may answer the same purpose. Why, he forced that worthy, at pistol's point, to change hats and coats with him. Then he left him, tied and gagged, and locked up in a room, while he walked out himself as boldly as though the city of New York belonged to him in fee simple. There was another of our city guardians on the watch outside, but friend Rockett hoodwinked him as easily as he had done his companion."

"But how was that? You would imagine he would have known him."

"It seems that the man inside got his mouth free, and gave the alarm. They ran together to the house, and the police-agent ran in. Rockett, however, concluded that he had business further on; so he slipped quietly away, and left the baffled officers to console themselves as best they might."

"Good, good!" cried Grace, clapping her hands. "I only hope he will continue to escape them."

"But you are not in sympathy with this murderer?" exclaimed her father, with a very serious face.

"He is not a murderer," she exclaimed indignantly. "He is incapable of such a crime. If it is in my power to protect him in any way I shall certainly do so."

"Come, come, Grace," answered her father, with earnest disapproval. "I am very sorry to hear you talk so."

"I can't help it, father. He saved my life and honor. I shall save his if the opportunity offers."

"Have you taken any action in that matter of Marie Ormiston?" asked Paul, by way of changing the subject.

"I have brought a charge against her before the authorities. She will be arrested before night, unless she has decamped."

"Oh, have you, father?"

"Yes. Not that I care so particularly to punish her. But she may reveal the names of those burglars. If Roger Glendon could only be unmasked."

"I hope he may," answered Paul earnestly. "I am sure he was the leader of the gang."

"I hope so, too," chimed in Grace earnestly.

But we will not listen further to this conversation, as the remainder of it might be of no interest to the reader.

CHAPTER VIII.

RUSTY MIKE TRIES HIS HAND.

SEVERAL days have passed since the date of our last chapter. Yet the two fugitives from justice are still at large, and the police are almost at their wits' end how to capture them. Since the moment of Bob Rockett's escape from the Blair street house he has completely vanished from sight. His companion, Beau Bink, has managed to clear himself in the eyes of the authorities by showing that he was forced to aid the fugitive in his escape. But he is utterly ignorant of the locality of Bob's present hiding-place, and the authorities are quite as much at sea.

The same uncertainty prevails in regard to Rusty Mike. The wood in which he secreted himself has been searched through and through,

and the whole surrounding country thoroughly examined, without effect.

The baffled officers say to themselves that they cannot imagine how the villain escaped. But that does not help the matter in the least. He has escaped; that is the one undoubted fact, although the whole country around has been on the look-out for him. The police are completely at a loss how to unfold this mystery, though they are inclined to believe that the fugitives are somewhere in the city. A great city certainly affords more secure hiding-places than any thickly-settled country district. But where? That's the rub. In what secret haunt of the dangerous classes are these men concealed?

It is now getting late in the spring, and there have been some of the usual revolutions in the weather. A week ago there was a shivering breath in the air, and all the world had donned its overcoats. But now, in these latter days of April, the sweet south-west wind is upon the land, there is a summery softness in the atmosphere, and folks are ready to forget that it ever was winter, and to wonder how long this scorching spell is to last.

The Garlands have left their stylish town house to the care of a servant, and moved, bag and baggage, to their country seat, a beautifully situated summer residence, on the Hudson, a few miles above the city.

Grace always desires to get here early, for she dearly loves her flowers, and from the time the first buds blow until the last leaves have fallen, there is no keeping her amid the stately coldness of city life.

The grounds of this charming riverside mansion were terraced down to the water's edge, each terrace being laid out in a beautiful garden, so arranged as to bring flowers successively into bloom during the whole season. On the lower terrace, at a point near where the river ran liquidly past, was an ornamental arbor, with its outlook upon the stream.

Here Grace loved to sit during the long summer hours, with her book and her work, and with the whole panorama of the busy river outspread before her eyes.

On the first day of their coming to this mansion she had eagerly sought her favorite seat, and long remained here in the balmy weather, her vision fixed dreamily upon the ever-shifting scene. Her father and husband were in the city. Only a single servant was in the house, the others having not yet come from the city; and she was almost alone in that solitary edifice.

But she felt no sense of loneliness. Everything about her was so familiar, every tree, every bush, seemed a personal friend. It would have seemed strange to her to fancy that she was not in the midst of a throng of intimate associates.

Out upon the stream vessel after vessel passed, some bound upward, some down toward the great city. Steamboats shot rapidly by, their long lines of smoke hovering in the quiet air after they had disappeared from view. Nearer the shore an occasional small boat passed, some being pleasure yachts, some the sturdy craft of fishermen, some row-boats, in which the lovers of the oar were enjoying this pleasant exercise. There was a sense of companionship to their solitary watcher even in this distant movement.

As she sat thus, with her eyes fixed dreamily upon the distant craft, she failed to notice that a small boat had crept in close along the shore, its single occupant guiding its course with an oar, as it floated down the stream, while his eyes were fixed with a keen glance upon the unconscious woman.

Now the boat's prow grated with a slight noise upon the pebbly beach, and the tall form of its occupant rose and stepped lightly ashore, anchoring the craft with a stone attached to the end of a short rope.

He was yet unobserved by Grace, who sat wrapped in a sort of day-dream, her eyes bent outward. Slowly the stranger drew himself up to the level of the terrace, and wound with a cat-like tread through the bushes toward her.

A hoarse "Hem!" called her attention to her more immediate surroundings. What was her surprise and alarm to perceive, in the entrance to the arbor, the form of a most unprepossessing tramp, as his dress seemed to indicate.

He was tall, raw-boned, and cadaverous, his pallid face fallen away until the bones seemed ready to protrude through the skin, while a dark ring surrounded the eyes, and the lips were set with a strange, puckered expression, the aspect of the whole face being that of one in whom starvation has been aided in its effects by some deep emotion of the mind.

Grace started to her feet with a cry of alarm

as this threatening form fixed its hollow eyes upon her.

"Don't get skeered, miss," he said in a hoarse, hollow voice, which he tried to make soft and appealing. "I'd be the last in the world to mean you harm. But, when a poor soul ain't had a bite o' vittals fer two blessed days, it kinder makes him bold, miss. If you could give the poor fellow a bite now. Jist a mouthful, say."

Grace looked into the pinched face, and her tender heart grew soft with pity. He certainly did seem to be on the verge of starvation.

"Wait a few minutes, my poor man," she kindly said, all her fear of him vanishing at the sight of his need, "I will bring you some food."

It never struck Grace, in her pitying speed, that it was something out of the usual course for men to come begging in a row-boat. She hurried to the house, and, without disturbing the servant, collected the materials for a goodly meal, with which she hastened back to the arbor.

"The poor creature," she said, sympathizingly, to herself. "He looks as if he had not tasted food for a week."

"Here is food for you," she exclaimed, placing it before him, where he had thrown himself down on the grass. "Do not eat too much now. It might hurt you. Just eat a little, and take the rest with you."

"Ah, but you're the dear, good leddy!" he cried, looking with a show of gratitude into her face. "May the blessings of the starving ever be yours!"

It struck her that there was a little of the cant of the professional beggar in his tone, but she continued to watch him with pitying eyes, as he devoured the food with the rapacity of a wild beast, rather than the hunger of a man.

"There, now. Take the remainder with you. It is not safe to eat too much when you are so hungry."

He looked up at her with the expression of a wolf which has been robbed of part of its food. But this look was followed by a grim smile, as he began to thrust the remaining food into his pockets, saying, in a tone that was half growl:

"Bless yer purty eyes, yer the kind and the sensible leddy, if ever there were one. I hope you'll 'scuse me,"—he had risen to his feet and stood upright before her—"but, I'm des'p't poor, as well as hungry. If the kind leddy would only give the poor fellow some'at to remember her by. A little trifle of cash, now."

She retreated a step in renewed alarm. There was a new look in the eyes of the man before her. She began to fear that her pity had caused her to lay aside her prudence.

"I have no money with me," she faltered.

"Now that's too drefful bad. But there's that purty chain round yer neck; and that vally'ble ring yer a-wearin'. Mebbe poor old Tom mought turn 'em into somethin' nice, and it'd be a blessing to you to know that yer savin' the poor from trouble."

"Now go, or I shall call for help!" she cried, in alarm. "I have given you food and you wish to rob me."

"I wouldn't rob you for all the 'world," he answered, with a frightful grin. "Only I knows as how them things ain't o' no vally to you. So I guess as how ye'd like to hand them over."

He took a quick step forward and grasped her by the wrist, while his sunken eyes glared into her face with a tigerish ferocity.

A scream of affright broke from her lips.

"Stop that, or I'll throttle ye!" he fiercely cried, as he tried to rend the gold chain from her neck.

But there was a sudden change in the state of affairs. Her scream had not been unheard. There came a crushing sound in the bushes, and the leap of a new figure on the scene.

The footpad found himself seized by the shoulders in an iron clasp, and hurled aside with a force like that of a giant. There stood the short, stout figure of the new-comer, his eyes blazing with indignation, his fists clenched as if he expected an attack from the discomfited tramp.

A strange cry broke from Grace's lips as she beheld him, a cry that seemed the outburst of surprise.

A like astonishment seemed to overcome the tramp.

"Bob Rockett!" came in faltering accents from his lips.

"Yes, Rusty Mike; and just in time, too, it seems."

A new cry came from Grace on hearing that terrible name. She fell back upon the arbor seat almost in a swoon.

"I'd like ter know what brings you yere, interfering with a gen'leman in his bizness!" growled Mike, his face furious with rage.

"Now, see here, Mike," cried Bob, walking fearlessly up to him, and laying a heavy hand upon his shoulder. "I know this lady, and I'd kill you, you hound, if you had done her any harm. You know me, Mike Crapper!"

"Like you killed my wife," muttered Mike.

Bob shook him as if he held but a leaf in his hand.

"You lying villain! so *that* is your game then, to try and lay your bloody work on me? I have you now, and you shall acknowledge the truth, in the presence of this lady, or you shall never escape my hands until I give you over to the authorities."

He grasped at Mike's wrist with his free hand, but the cunning villain made a quick stoop tearing his shoulder loose from Bob's clutch. An agile backward leap, and he had broken through a clump of bushes beside which he stood.

Bob made no effort to pursue him. But he had no idea of letting him escape so easily. In a moment the barrel of a pistol glittered in the sun.

"Stop!" he cried, in a commanding voice.

Mike, who had leaped from the edge of the terrace to the narrow beach of the stream, turned on hearing this peremptory command. But a hoarse laugh of defiance came from his lips as he took another step toward the boat. There was a sharp report. A bullet whistled past his ear.

"Stop! I say," cried Bob, with still more energy of tone.

At this juncture, Grace ran hastily forward and caught Bob's arm with a frightened gesture.

"Oh, don't shoot him!" she cried. "Oh, for mercy's sake, don't shoot him!"

Bob looked at her appealing face and lowered his pistol.

"You will not acknowledge?" he cried to Mike.

"Never!"

"Very well. I know what remains to do then. The next time I find you—and it will not be long—you shall not escape me so easily. You may go now."

Mike leaped into his boat, lifted the rude anchor and hastily pushed the small craft from the shore. He was not yet sure of Bob's forbearance and seemed to think it good policy to make haste from that dangerous locality.

Grace had loosed her hold of Bob's arm. She retreated a step or two, looking upon him with mingled emotions.

He turned toward her.

"Do you, too, believe me a murderer?" he asked.

"No, no! I never did! I never could!"

"I am bad enough," he said, somewhat sadly. "I did take part in that attempt at bank robbery. But I was driven to it by need and by your father's coldness toward me. But to commit murder! I hope I am incapable of that."

"I am sure you are," she fervently replied.

"Thanks! thanks!" he rejoined. "Let me clear myself in your eyes, and I care not what others may think."

"Will you not do more?" she exclaimed, extending her arms appealingly toward him.

"Will you not avoid all crime? Will you not seek to live an honest life? Oh! it is too dreadful to think of a man like you entering into such fatal courses! Promise me! I will help you! I will aid you to the extent of my powers!"

He looked at her with moistened eyes. There was a quiver in his lips as he spoke.

"I will! With God's help I will be an honest man! I have committed my last crime!"

"Oh thanks, thanks! I know you will, and that I can help you. But this murder—this dreadful charge?"

Her voice failed her. A look of horror came upon her face.

"I am innocent of it, before Heaven! But I cannot prove my innocence now! If I have time I may do so. But if I am captured now I will be surely condemned. And the blood-hounds of the law are after me."

He looked around with the glance of one who dreads pursuit.

"If I can help you! If I can secrete you! Anything to save you from that!"

As she spoke there was an uproar of loud voices from the direction of the house, which made Bob give a nervous start. Were the pursuers then so closely on his track?

CHAPTER IX.

BOB WAKES UP THE WRONG CUSTOMER.

We must go back a few hours in our story in

order to explain this sudden appearance of Bob Rockett at the country seat of the Garlands.

He had good reason for a hasty movement out of town, as we will explain. Bob might have remained in safety in the hiding-place which he had sought after leaving Beau Bink's apartment, but there were two reasons acting to bring him again into a situation of danger. One of these was a feeling of contempt for the police, arising from his many escapes; and a sense of belief in his star which made him bold and venturesome. The other was a cause which rendered it necessary for him to expose himself to danger. This we will explain.

The questionable circumstances which had produced the suspicion against him, as an accomplice of Rusty Mike in the murder of his wife, could be explained away by a certain witness whose services Bob was very anxious to secure.

In fact he had just read a full account of the inquest over the murdered woman, and of the evidence given by the inmates of the house. Some of this testimony seemed to strike him as very favorable to himself.

"By Jove!" he cried, suddenly flinging down the paper, "the sky is beginning to clear. If I can only find Roger Glinton now, and get him to come up like a man, the whole thing is settled. Roger will not go back on me—but he may have made tracks from the city."

Fortunately for his plans Bob had a very good idea of where to look for his accomplice in the bank robbery. He knew Roger's usual places of resort perfectly well, but he had a shrewd idea just now that he would be most likely to find him in another locality.

In fact he was well aware of the impression which the beautiful face and engaging manners of Marie Ormiston had made upon his quondam friend, and of the devoted attention which Roger was paying to this attractive young lady.

"I've a notion that he goes there every day about this hour," said Bob to himself. "There's the spot to catch my hearty young blood. Roger is blamably given to look out for number one, but I don't fancy that he'll go back on me in this affair. He is like a good many others; he can be mighty good-hearted where he has nothing to lose by it."

Bob was not long in putting his idea into practice. It was hardly safe, however, to venture into the street without some effort at disguise, but he contented himself by putting a heavy false beard on his usually smooth chin, and by wearing a cap which concealed the upper portion of his face.

These additions to his costume made a marked change in his appearance, so that no one would be likely to recognize him from a mere description.

But he had no idea of trusting himself to the chances of the street. He hailed a passing cab, gave the driver the street and number which he sought, and lay back securely on the cushions, metaphorically snapping his fingers at the guardians of the law.

The locality in question was situated some distance up-town. Bob enjoyed a look at the streets from which he had been for some time debarred, while the horses rapidly made their way toward their destination.

"Here you are," cried the coachman, as he drew his horses up and sprang to the ground, throwing open the cab door.

"Wait for me," said Bob, as he got out. "I will not be long."

Striding up the steps of the house he gave a vigorous pull at the bell. He waited for a minute or two, but there was no response to his ring.

"Are they all asleep inside?" he muttered. "Or has Roger grown so sweet on the fair Marie that they have no ears for such matters as bells? All right then, I'll make myself at home."

The door opened readily to his hand and he stepped within. The passage was empty. Bob pushed open the door of the parlor which lay to his right and looked in.

"Hey! all the good people of the house!" he cried. "Is nobody at home, that visitors must be left to cool their heels on your doorstep?"

"Did you ring?" came a strange voice from within.

"I fancy so. Hello! you're a stranger here. What's become of the folks?"

It was a somewhat stout individual who stood before him, dressed in a half-uniform, which Bob at once recognized as that of the police.

"Are you a friend of the family?" asked this person, looking keenly at Bob.

"Yes, a most decidedly gullible friend. He's your best friend I suppose who feeds you for

nothing. Well, that's me. I've given them groceries out of my store on tick till they've run up a scorching bill. But when I come for my money they're not at home."

Bob shrugged his shoulders and made a comical grimace, that set the officer off in an amused laugh.

"You're thoroughly dished then, my trusting friend. They're gone, bag and baggage."

"Bless us! you don't tell me that? Where have they struck out to?"

"I wish you'd tell me that. There are other folks want to see them besides yourself. Well, not to mince matters, there's a warrant of arrest out for them. But somehow they've smelt the rat, and vamoosed. There's nothing here but the heavy furniture."

"And that belongs to the landlord," said Bob, turning, with a heavy heart, for this unlooked-for flight might possibly prove very disastrous for him.

Without the aid of Roger Glinton he might be convicted of a murder of which he was as innocent as a child.

He turned too quickly in fact. He had been standing close beside the door, and, in his hasty movement, his face brushed against the side of the half-open portal, loosening and sweeping the false beard from his face.

He stooped hastily to pick it up. But the officer had observed the incident, and a quick suspicion flashed into his eyes as he sprang forward and caught Bob by the shoulder.

"What is this?" he cried quickly. "Let me see your face again, my friend."

Bob rose, with the recovered beard in his hand. His profile was turned toward the officer.

"Hal! by all that's good, it's Bob Rockett! Here's a find worth a dozen of your fancy women. By Jupiter, I'm in luck!"

"Don't swear to that," growled Bob.

He was still rising as he spoke. His right side was turned toward the officer, whose hand lay heavily on that shoulder. But in the very act of rising Bob swung round sharply on his right heel. This movement added force to the weight of his left hand which struck the officer a stunning blow on the temple.

That dignitary dropped to the floor like an ox when struck by the ax of the butcher.

The whole affair had been so quick and successful that Bob himself viewed the fallen officer with some surprise. A grim laugh of amusement broke from his lips as he dashed through the passage to the front door, hastily clapping the beard to his face as he did so.

He leaped into the cab which stood awaiting him.

"To the Hudson River Railroad Depot! Like lightning!" he cried. "A dollar extra for yourself if you let no one overtake you. Drive on!"

"Ay! ay!" returned the driver, giving the reins to his horses and touching them shrewdly with the whip.

At this moment the front door of the house burst open, and the officer appeared. He had not been stunned, as Bob had fancied.

"Stop thief! Stop murderer!" he yelled, on perceiving the flying cab.

But caddy paid no attention to this cry, which, indeed, was so inarticulate that he did not understand it. He only stirred up his horses to greater speed.

The officer started in full chase down the street after him, giving the alarm as he ran. Others joined in the pursuit. The alarm-rattle sounded in all directions. But the fugitives kept a good distance in advance, and rapidly gained ground over their running pursuers.

Not many minutes were occupied in reaching the railroad station. Bob sprang out, hastily paid the cabman his fare, with the offered gratuity, and ran into the depot building.

He was just in time. A passenger-train was on the point of starting. Hastily procuring a ticket he sprang on board the last car of the train, which was already in motion.

Breathlessly he stood on the rear platform, looking back as the train gathered speed. Soon they had drawn out of the station and were rapidly gathering speed in their onward course.

Two minutes afterward the officer dashed headlong into the wide doorway of the station, followed by a throng of excited followers. He had succeeded in gaining a cab and following the fugitives at a distance.

"What is wrong?" yelled the crowd.

"Murder! Bob Rockett! An escaping murderer! He is here! I saw him leave the cab! Shut the doors! Don't let him escape!"

The excitement spread rapidly. Everybody was in motion. Every man looked suspiciously at his neighbor.

"A short, stout man, was he not?" asked the ticket seller, as he came hastily from his office. "Yes, with a heavy black beard!"

"You are too late then. He bought a ticket, and is off in the train that started three minutes ago. It is more than a mile out by this time."

A look of dismay came upon the officer's face. He removed his hat and wiped the sweat from his face. A crowd of interested auditors had gathered around him.

"But you can telegraph on and have the train searched," suggested the ticket agent.

"A good thought! We will telegraph to the authorities at every station where the train stops. Thanks for the idea. We will have him yet, unless he chooses to break his neck by springing from the train between stations."

In a few minutes more lightning messengers were darting through those long lines of wire that bordered the track, leaving the train quickly behind in their marvelous speed, and carrying forward the story of Bob Rockett's daring escape.

All along the road the authorities were put on the alert. He was a murderer in flight. He must be captured. Such was the burden of the tune that was played upon those marvelous wires.

And still the train rushed along its iron way, seemingly too swift for pursuit, yet already left far in the rear by those silent messengers that had sped so rapidly on their way.

But, as may well be imagined, Bob Rockett was fully aware of this danger, and on the alert to escape it. With its loud whistle of warning the train slowed up toward its first stopping place. Yet twenty minutes before its arrival the news of the escape had reached this point, and a dozen men were gathered upon the platform commissioned to search the train.

Slowly the wheels ceased to turn. The long train came to a dead halt.

"Hold!" cried an authoritative voice to the conductor. "Don't let a person leave the train. There is an escaping criminal on board. A murderer. The cars must be searched."

The men appointed for that purpose had already sprung to the platforms of the cars, and guarded the doors at each end, while the person who had spoken went cautiously through the cars, examining the face of every male passenger with a keen scrutiny. Yet he reached the rear car without seeing a person resembling the description of Bob Rockett.

He passed through this still more carefully. Near the end was a cross-looking old fellow, who was fretting and growling fiercely at the outrage of making the passengers prisoners in the cars.

"Ain't found your man, I guess?" he growled, as if glad at their failure.

"No. Do you know anything about him?"

"Well, there was a chap jumped off the tail end of the train a distance back, just when it began to slow up. Shouldn't wonder if he was your game."

At this cool announcement a curse broke from the lips of the searcher.

"Why didn't you tell us that five minutes ago, you old donkey?"

"Old donkeys, when they're shut up this way in a stable, take their own time to kick, you know. I guess you felt the donkey's heels that time."

The searcher rushed from the train. "He has escaped!" he shouted. "After him, lads! He must have made his way toward the river. We will have him yet."

In a minute more the special police guard were on their way toward this stream, which ran here at nearly half a mile distance from the railroad.

The fugitive had about ten minutes the start, and had made such good use of his time, that they failed to see him, though much of the country lay open to the view.

On reaching the neighborhood of the river they spread out, extending their line along the row of elegant private residences which there bordered the flowing stream.

Two or three of them were in the neighborhood of Mr. Garland's residence, which formed one of these mansions, when the clear sound of a pistol-shot broke out upon the air, coming from that direction.

A cry of alarm burst from their lips as they started toward the mansion from which the sound seemed to proceed.

CHAPTER X.

SEEKING BUT NOT FINDING.

WE must return to Bob Rockett and Grace, whom we left in the garden of Mr. Garland's riverside mansion. He had arrived as

we know, just in time to protect her from the hands of her infamous assailant, Rusty Mike.

But he was himself a fugitive; the pursuers were close upon his footsteps, his pistol-shot had guided them; their voices were heard in loud outcries from the neighboring road; whither should he flee for safety?

He looked to right and left like a wild animal at bay. Yonder was the river, but it held no boat by which to escape. The country was alarmed, it would soon be bristling with pursuers, there was no safety by land. His perplexed eyes turned upon the face of his warm-hearted companion. Her eyes were fixed meaningfully upon him.

"You are in danger? You are pursued? These are the voices of your enemies?" she hurriedly asked.

"Yes, yes. And—" his voice sunk into silence, as he again looked in deep disquiet around.

"And you see no way to escape?"

"None."

"Then I will conceal you. I believe you innocent; and I owe you that, and far more than that. Follow me, quickly. There is not a moment to lose."

She led the way with a light and rapid step toward the house.

They could hear the tones of the pursuers calling through the still air. They seemed all around them. Already some of them appeared to have invaded the garden. Only the thick, clustering shrubbery of the winding alleys hid the fugitives from sight.

"Come, come!" rung the low, clear tones of the beautiful guide. "Quickly! They are at a distance yet. We can gain the house unseen."

Bob darted forward with redoubled speed. He grasped her arm and almost carried her onward in his strong gripe. It was indeed no time to stand on ceremony. In a minute more they had gained the house, and passed out of sight through its rear door. Panting, breathless, overcome with exertion, Grace hastily closed the door and turned the key in the lock. She then fell back with a reeling motion against the side wall of the passage, her brain swimming with a momentary faintness.

Almost at the same instant two of the pursuers broke through the shrubbery and came into full view of the house on this side.

"There is nobody here," cried one; "yet I could swear that I heard a movement through the bushes."

"Try the door," suggested the other.

Hastening forward he turned the handle of the door. It failed to open.

"It is locked," he said.

"We must have been mistaken," declared his companion. "Or perhaps the noise we heard was some one going the other way. Let us search the garden."

They had hardly vanished within the bushy closeness of the garden walks before other pursuers came upon the scene. The pistol-shot had caused a general alarm.

"It came from this direction. There is no doubt of that," cried one of these. "Where are the men who came this way?"

"Yonder they go, through the garden. I'll wager a thousand the murderer is somewhere about this establishment. We must set guards in the road and all around it. Ten to one but we have him caged here. Some of you run to the right and left, and rouse the people in the next houses. Give a general alarm. If he has got away from these grounds he cannot go far before we have him."

Quick movements followed in response to these orders. The clustered group dispersed again, some to establish themselves as sentinels around the Garland property, others to carry on the news, and set the whole neighborhood in alarm.

Meanwhile the two fugitives had heard with suppressed excitement the voices without, and the effort upon the door. They looked at each other with startled eyes.

"That was a narrow chance for safety," ejaculated Bob, with a breath of relief as the receding footsteps of his pursuers were heard.

"Follow me," she briefly answered. "The moments are golden now. We have none to waste."

She led quickly to the foot of the stairs, and hastened up them to the second floor of the house, Bob following. Despite his usual energy and coolness, his heart was beating like a trip-hammer. It is not easy to command one's nerves in such perilous escapes.

Outside the leader of the party of search was left alone. He had sent off all his force in different directions, and stood leaning against the

trunk of a tree that rose beside him, waiting the result of the search of the garden. His haste had been such that he needed a short rest to recover his breath.

Five minutes elapsed, during which, at intervals, could be seen the forms of the men who were thoroughly investigating the bush-grown gardens. At the end of that time they approached him, with disappointment written upon their faces.

"No returns," cried out the nearest. "The place is empty. Our man is not here."

An expression of doubt came upon the leader's countenance.

"I believe he is in that house," remarked the other. "We heard a rustling noise in the bushes. When we came up there was no one there, but the back door was locked. He must have entered."

This idea suddenly aroused the indecisive leader.

"I believe you are right!" he cried. "We will search it, at any rate. That pistol-shot was not made by a bird or a fish. Here, Phil, you keep an eye upon this side of the house. Tim and I will go in from the front. If our man is there he has got to come out."

In a moment more he had leaped the garden wall into the road, and was approaching the front door of the mansion.

A loud, sharp peal at the bell brought to the door the only servant present in the mansion, a woman who had been employed in the kitchen, and had failed to perceive any of these events.

"Whose house is this?" asked the officer.

"Misther Garland's, sure."

It was evident from what part of the world this good lady had come.

"Is any of the family at home?"

"Nobody at all, sur. 'Cept Miss Grace and meself, which is two of us."

"Call Miss Grace!"

"Shure, an' maybe she might ax who wants to see her," answered the woman, growing suspicious of this sharp-voiced visitor.

"You may tell her that it is an officer, who has come to search the house for an escaped murderer," said the speaker, showing his star as he pushed rudely past the woman and into the hall.

"Och! fur the good Lord's blessing! A murderer!" she screamed. "But, save you, honey, there's not the 'scription of a soul in the house but meself and Miss Grace. And that's the Heaven's own truth."

"We will see that," exclaimed the officer, curtly, pushing on toward the stairs. "Stand here, Tim, and guard the stairs. I will search the lower rooms."

The woman stood for a moment aghast at this summary proceeding. She then attempted to run up the stairs, but was prevented by the man on guard.

"You omadhoun! To have the impudence to stop me in me own house!" she cried, struggling to pass him. "Oh, Miss Grace! Miss Grace! Shure, an' you'd best come down here. There's a pair o' burglars, and I'm a-wearin' me soul out a-tryin' to stop them from robbin' all the vally'bels. I do b'lieve they're 'mong the silver at this blessed minute, and in broad day at that."

After several minutes of this loud calling, Grace appeared at the head of the stairs, and looked down with an expression of surprise. At the same instant the leader of the searching party reappeared from an unsuccessful investigation of the lower rooms.

"What is the matter? What means all this outcry?" asked Grace with dignity.

"Excuse me, miss," replied the officer, politely. "I am sorry to find only women in the house, for it is necessary that we should search it. We are in pursuit of a fugitive, a murderer, whom we have reason to believe has concealed himself here. We will put you to no inconvenience, but the house must be searched."

"There is no fugitive murderer here," she coldly answered.

"That you cannot be sure of. He was traced to the grounds of this mansion. He was heard to enter the house. He may have concealed himself here without your knowledge."

"And why should I believe such a story?" she replied suspiciously. "Where is your authority for such a search?"

"It is here," he answered, as he threw open his coat, and displayed the policeman's star.

"That may be counterfeited," she coldly rejoined. "Come, Bridget. I do not feel like trusting this person alone in our house. He may search for his mystical murderer, but we must look out that nothing else disappears."

With a grimace at the sharp suspicion in the

tone of the young lady the officer ascended the stairs, and proceeded to look through room after room, closely followed in his every step by the two women, and encouraged in his search by certain very uncomplimentary remarks from Bridget. Grace kept silent, however. There was an anxiety upon her face which she sought to hide from the vigilant eyes of the officer.

"This room?" said the searcher, as one door failed to yield to his hand.

"You cannot enter there."

"Why not?"

"Because that is my own chamber. And because I came from it just now, on hearing Bridget's call. I do not choose to lay open my private apartment at your demand. You may take my word that it conceals no murderer."

"Oh!" he shrugged his shoulders meaningly. "Very well. I will go to the upper floor, then." He walked to the head of the stairs. "Tim!"

"Well, sir?"

"Come up here, and keep an eye upon this floor, while I look into the upper rooms."

The third story was quickly searched. It contained but a few rooms, and these—like the whole house, in fact—held no hiding-places. The officer reluctantly concluded that he must have been mistaken, and that the fugitive had not entered there.

"I hope you will excuse me," he said to Grace, on regaining the second floor. "Of course I consider your word as sufficient, but I have to answer to others who may be less considerate. It is necessary that I should satisfy myself by a look into that locked room."

"I have already told you that it holds no murderer," replied Grace coldly. "I decline to open it."

"Then we shall have to break it open."

"Do so at your peril," she quickly rejoined. "You have no warrant to sustain you in any such high-handed proceeding. You may find it a dangerous experiment to enter any citizen's house, and proceed to break open doors without authority."

"We will see about that," exclaimed the officer. "Come here, Tim. I will take the responsibility."

The two men advanced to the door, Grace following them with anxious eyes.

On arriving there they hesitated a moment and conversed together in low tones. It was a rather dangerous experiment which they had threatened to try. They naturally dreaded the consequences. The officer again turned to Grace.

"We do not wish to proceed to extremities," he said. "Yet I should imagine that you would not care to have us leave the house with this suspicion hanging over your head. You know what people will think."

"I care not what they think," she curtly rejoined. "But you shall see the room. I have nothing to hide. If you doubt my word you shall see for yourself. Here is the key."

She felt in her pocket for the key. It did not appear to be there.

"Ah, I remember! Bridget, you will find it on the mantel in the hall-bedroom. I was standing there with it in my hand a few minutes ago."

Bridget went for the key, leaving the three others in silent waiting for her return. But Grace had changed her manner to the officers. Instead of preserving her former haughty silence she now kept up a rapid conversation, asking a dozen questions about the object of their search.

"Ah! here is the key. Now, gentlemen, you shall see for yourselves."

In a moment the door stood wide open and the officers had entered. They looked around. It was as she had said, furnished as a lady's bedchamber. A moment's examination showed that it contained no fugitive.

"Where does this door lead?" asked the officer, pointing to a door at one side of the room.

"To the next apartment, which you have already searched," replied Grace, in an unnatural, half-choked utterance. There was a gulping sound in her throat which she disguised by a cough.

"What gives you this fancy, that your fugitive is concealed here?" she hastily continued, as they left the room.

"Because a pistol-shot was heard in your garden."

"A pistol-shot! At whom? Do murderers usually fire pistols to warn the pursuers where to find them?"

"Hardly," said the officer, struck by this suggestion.

Meanwhile, Tim, not yet satisfied, had looked into the room to which led the communicating door from Grace's chamber. She watched him with a paling face.

"I heard that noise, but did not understand it," she remarked. "There was a boat moored at the foot of the garden. Is it there yet? Your murderer may have taken to the water."

The partly concealed anxiety of her face disappeared when Tim emerged from the room. His look showed the hat had found nothing.

"A boat!" cried the officer. "A good suggestion. You may be right. He is not here, at all events, and I am sorry for having disturbed you. Come, Tim."

"Bridget, show the gentlemen to the door," remarked Grace coldly.

She stood erect and motionless as a statue, while their retreating steps sounded on the stairs, and until the closing door admonished her that they had left the house.

Then she turned, and reeled rather than walked into her room, every vestige of color leaving her face.

There, almost as pale as she, stood Bob Rockett, supporting himself with his hand on the frame of the communicating door.

"You are an angel of wit and kindness!" he cried, making as if he would fall on his knees before her. "Your suggestion about this door has saved me. I heard your voice and knew just when to slip through this fortunate portal."

"I told them that there was no murderer here," she said, her lips deathly white.

"Nor is there," he earnestly replied. "And as for crime of any sort I am done with it forever. You have saved me from a life of shame and misery."

"But this dreadful charge! Did you not say that if you had time you could prove your innocence?"

"Yes. I can prove an alibi."

"By whom?"

"By a man who has disappeared, and whom I have tried in vain to find. By Roger Glendon."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, with deep interest.

"Yes. But he is gone. He has fled with Marie Orniston. I know not where, nor am I in a position to find him."

"Then I will make that my task," she fervently replied. "No money, no effort, no time shall be spared to discover him. If he can save you he shall be found."

"Thanks! a thousand thanks!" faltered Bob.

"But you must stay here until night. I will see that no one in the house discovers you."

CHAPTER XI.

HAUNTED BY THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

WHERE is there in the world a region more barren and desolate than in the sandy regions of New Jersey? To those who pass by rail through these benighted regions, the view of desert reaches of sand, thinly covered with scrub pine and oak, and destitute for miles of a sign of life, with scarce an insect visible in the sweltering air, is a most depressing sight. But to be doomed to wander on foot through such life-forsaken scenes, to journey for miles through the yielding sands, or across quaking bogs, without a semblance of living companionship, who could long endure such an existence?

And particularly if one be haunted by a crime, from which he is seeking to fly, but which ever remorselessly pursues him, it would seem as if madness must follow such a horrible experience.

So it was with the wretch whom we see there now, dragging himself along slowly under those gloomy pines, or anon running like a madman over the depressing wastes, with his face turned fearfully over his shoulder, as though he saw some dread specter on his track.

It was Rusty Mike. He had somehow made his way from the Hudson to these benighted regions, without discovery.

But what a change had come upon him! He had been already haggard and cadaverous in his interview with Grace Essex. But since then remorse, fear, and perhaps hunger, had told fearfully upon him. His face was thin almost as that of a skeleton, the skin drawn tightly over its fleshlessness, while the eyes glittered with a feverish intensity in the starved face as if the last kindled embers of the soul were flashing through the ashes of a burnt-out life.

It was as if the ghost of his murdered wife were pursuing him step by step, never giving the wretch a moment's rest, but following his footsteps with remorseless activity. There was incipient madness in the shuddering looks which he cast over his shoulder, in the haste with which he started on from every momentary pause, in the cries of horror which now and then broke from his lips.

It was the fitting end to a life of crime, the retribution which a long indulgence in brutality must in time build up for the heartless wretch.

"Oh, mercy, mercy!" he yelled. "Away, away, horrible shape! Leave me! Oh, will you never leave me?"

He hurried on, his lips working in convulsive mutterings.

"Ah! I must see a human face! Anything, any danger—but this! Let them take me if they will. I am dying now for food. No, no, I am dying of fear, that bloody face is killing me! Oh! I must get among men and women! She will not follow me there! Anything to escape from this!"

An hour afterward found the wretch in a small village, that rose like an oasis out of the desert woods. He was like a specter come among men and women. They gazed at him with half-scared eyes. Shrunk from him as from a maniac or a monster, but did not refuse him the food for which he craved, and which he devoured like a famished beast.

He showed a fear to depart. He clung to the vicinity of these beings of his own kind, as if they could protect him from the spectral image, which his averted eyes still saw over his shoulder.

"Move on!" cried one of the villagers, in brutal tones. "We have no room here for tramps or vagrants. Move on to where you can find work or a poor-house."

He quietly obeyed. All the old fierce spirit in him had been quelled. He would have submitted to any insults for the privilege of escaping those dread solitudes and keeping in human company. To be alone with his own thoughts! That was a more horrible fate than any to which man could doom him.

For several days this human specter was seen wandering through village after village of that part of the State. Who could he be? Whence had he come? Strange surmises began to be entertained about him. The story of his appearance got into the papers. He became famous even as far as New York.

It was a gloomy day in mid May when he made his advent into Sandtown, one of the larger villages in his line of travel. His fear of man was wearing off as he found that his true character had been recognized. And the starved look of his face was somewhat changed since charity had supplied him with food. But the shuddering dread in his eyes remained there yet, and was the worse this day as the warm sunshine had disappeared, and a cold, drizzling rain took its place.

He crept like a haunted man into the village, made his way shivering along its streets, and at length crawled under the high porch of the village inn, where he curled himself up like a soaked dog, out of the rain at least, if not away from his thoughts.

His advent had been observed by a group of village gossips on the inn porch, and an animated conversation ensued, of which he was the subject. They had heard of him before, and fifty surmises were made as to who he was, and as many views as to what should be done with the living skeleton, by which title they designated him.

Something in this conversation attracted the attention of a young man, a stranger in the village, who had lately driven up to the inn. He listened for a while to their talk, and asked several questions about the appearance of the tramp, while a look of growing satisfaction came into his eyes.

"And he is under the porch here now?"

"Yes. He's been there this hour."

"Will one of you be kind enough to call him out? I would like to see this man."

One of the inn gossips readily complied with this request, stirring up the tramp with his foot, and curtly bidding him to "come out of there."

With a groan and a muttered curse Mike obeyed, and followed his conductor to the porch, where he stood glaring around with his hair insane eyes, though with a secret satisfaction that he was in the company of his own kind.

"S'pose ye want me, gentlemen," he muttered, looking from face to face.

"Yes, there's a gentleman here wants a look at your phiz," replied the man who had summoned him.

Mike looked around in the direction of the pointing finger. A cry of alarm and a quick curse broke from his lips.

"Bob—"

"There, there! None of that now!" And Bob Rockett, for it was he, faced him with a commanding look. "It's all up, Mike. I have heard of your being here, and have come after you. You will go with me."

A touch of Mike's fierce recklessness returned.

"Devil take me then if—"

"Hold there, now! Gentlemen, this man is Mike Crapper, the murderer. He goes with me to New York."

Had a bombshell fallen from a clear sky into their midst there could not have been greater surprise and consternation than the group of village gossips exhibited at that astounding intelligence. Staring eyes, uplifted hands, paralyzed tongues, chairs overturned in their hasty movement backward, partly testified to the surge of feeling which had shot through their brains.

"Mike Crapper!" "The murderer!" "Well, I'll swear!" "God darn me, if that don't beat all!" were a sample of the exclamations which burst from the astounded villagers.

"Exactly. Some one tell the landlord to bring out my team."

He touched the shrinking villain on the shoulder, and whispered in his ear.

"Come, Mike, no humbug now. I gave you a chance to do me justice, and you refused. I told you then that you should not escape me, and that I would hand you over to the police. What I say I mean, Mike Crapper. You shall hang for the murder of that woman, if I have to die in your company."

Mike, with a lowering but cowed face, muttered

something unintelligible in reply. He was no longer the man he had been of old.

"Will some one get him a bite of victuals?" asked Bob. "He looks famished."

"Ain't eat a morsel these two days," grumbled Mike.

One of the men hastened back with this charitable intent. Mike seemed utterly cowed. He remained in a bowed attitude, his eyes fixed dully upon his captor. When the food was brought him he devoured it with the ravenous appetite of a starving dog.

At the same time Bob's team, a one-horse open wagon, was brought around to the hotel front.

"Don't you want some help?" asked a sturdy villager. "It moughtn't be safe fur you to travel alone with that ruffian."

A half laugh broke from Bob's lips. He drew up his powerful form, and fixed his eyes with a contemptuous look upon his prisoner.

"No, thank you," he said. "I fancy that I am a good match for our friend here."

It seemed so indeed, for Bob was the impersonation of health and strength, while his captive, though raw-boned and muscular, was so emaciated that he looked as if he would be but a feather in the hands of his vigorous captor.

In a few minutes more they were in the carriage and away, followed by the wondering and excited looks of the villagers.

"My stars! he takes a murderer without even handcuffing him!" cried the landlord.

"He's a bold one, you bet," exclaimed another. "Did you notice his shoulders? Why he's a young giant."

"And I saw the shape of a pistol-stock in his pocket," announced a third. "The murderer wouldn't have no more chance in his hands than a cat-bird in a hawk's claws."

For miles and miles they drove through that gloomy May day, ever tending toward the city in the distance.

Mike kept silent and gloomy. One would have said that he was glad of even this as a release from his late dismal hauntings. Once he looked at his captor, with a awakening ferocity in his eyes, but this feeling quailed before Bob's resolute glance. Once he made an appeal for release.

"We'll hang together, you know."

"Together or separate it matters not," rejoined Bob. "You cowardly villain! from the moment you went back on me for your wife's murder, and tried to throw it on my shoulders, I swore you should hang for it. And hang you shall, whatever comes to me."

They relapsed into silence again, driving on over the country roads, and through thickly clustered villages and towns as they drew nearer to the city. Mike's head was dropped upon his breast, his eyes listless, his lips white and trembling. He seemed thoroughly cowed.

Nightfall was approaching as they at length drove through the streets of Jersey City, and approached the ferry leading across the North river to New York.

But few of the officers were left in the central police station, when at length this carriage, with its strange occupants, halted in front of the door, and Bob, in a hoarse voice, bade his comrade descend.

Mr. Foster, and the two or three officers who remained with him, in the main room of the station, lifted their eyes questioning, as these two men entered.

Mike walked in a bent attitude, with a treacherous expression in his eyes as they half turned upon his captor.

"Well, my friends," said Mr. Foster shortly, "what can I do for you?"

Bob's voice seemed to have grown hoarse as he answered. But there was no faltering in its firm tones.

"I have been doing your work for you, gentlemen. I have brought you here Mike Crapper, the murderer. Here is your man. You will please relieve me of any further charge of him."

"The deuce!" exclaimed the officer, springing from his listless attitude, and hurrying across the floor, to fix his keen eyes on Mike's lowering face.

"By Heavens, boys, it is he! Hang me, if this isn't a catch worth making! And who are you, and where and how did you manage to take him?" he asked, turning to Bob.

"I will tell you," exclaimed Mike maliciously. "It's a double catch maybe. He is—"

"Hold!" cried Bob, clapping his hand on the murderer's mouth. "I have the first word in this game. I am he who has been falsely accused of taking part in this murder, and whom this villain refuses to clear of the charge. I am Bob Rockett, the accused!"

There was a look of dignity upon his face, in strong contrast to the shrinking cowardice of his companion, as he stood upright and calm before the officers, devoted to his fate.

CHAPTER XII.

THE NET DRAWING IN.

THERE was considerable excitement in the reading public of New York, when the news of the event described in our last chapter became known. For a murderer to surrender himself voluntarily, with the purpose of bringing his confederate to justice, such an event was unprecedented. What could be the real motive at the bottom of it? It certainly did not look like the act of a guilty man, and a strong sentiment in favor of Bob Rockett's innocence was created in the public mind by his self-sacrifice in behalf of justice.

He was interviewed in his prison cell by an enterprising newspaper reporter, and gave the following information beyond that already known to the reader. He declared that he had not been in the room of the murderer on the day of the crime. He had business with him, and had met him on the stairs on the way to his room. Mike Crapper had acted very strangely on that occasion, had insisted that they should go outside for the transaction of their business, and on his visitor's complaint of the heat, had taken his overcoat, saying that he would take care of it until it was wanted again.

The overcoat was left in the murderer's room, and the blood on its sleeve, and on the handkerchief in its pocket, was probably put there by the murderer with the sudden thought of implicating his visitor in the crime.

"He always hated me," continued Bob, "and probably wished to injure me in this way. At any rate I did not hear of the murder until the evening of that day, and was astonished to find that my name was coupled with it."

"I have met Mike Crapper since," he proceeded, "and demanded that he should do me justice, which he refused to do. From that moment I determined that he, himself, should be brought to justice, whatever the consequence to me."

"And have you no proof of this statement? Nothing to exonerate you?"

"Nothing whatever. There is a proof which would clear me if I could get at it. I do not know whether or not I will succeed."

"What is its nature?" asked the reporter.

"I decline to tell. The matter is in the hands of my lawyer, and of a friend. I do not know if it would be to my advantage to make it public."

This was all the shrewd questioning reporter could get from him. He persistently refused to tell what was this evidence on which he relied to prove his innocence.

The tidings of this strange event were received at the Garland household with varied emotions. Grace had made no secret of her adventures with the two fugitives, and a thrill of horror went through the souls of her listeners on hearing of her perilous adventure with the murderer.

"To think of your trusting him so as to return to him alone!" exclaimed her father. "Why you might have known that it was dangerous. Such men have no gratitude."

"I know it now," replied Grace. "I have learned a lesson in prudence."

"And then to bring that other man into the house, and conceal him from the police! It was a very bold and risky action. And to put yourself in the power of a murderer!"

"He is no murderer!" cried Grace indignantly. "And after what he did for me I would have been ungrateful indeed to refuse him protection. What do you say, Paul? Did I not do right?"

Paul made no answer, but he put his arm around her waist, and looked into her sparkling eyes with an expression of perfect trust and devotion.

"I know you agree with me."

"Indeed I do," answered Paul. "I have utterly changed my opinion about Bob Rockett. Since the day I saved his life upon the river he has done me nothing but good, and I cannot believe that such a man is capable of the dark crime that is charged against him."

She turned impulsively and imprinted a fervent kiss upon his lips.

"Thanks! thanks!" she ejaculated. "I knew you would not leave me alone in my faith in him."

"All sentiment! All ridiculous sentiment!" growled her father. "The evidence against him is overwhelming."

"But this last act of his, father?"

"Yes, I admit that is strange, and I hardly know how to understand it. But then he may have felt himself so cornered by the police that escape was impossible, and this may be only a ruse to create a public feeling in his favor."

"He was not cornered by the police," she cried impulsively. "He defied the police. You give him credit for nothing."

"I don't want to be hard, child," replied her father calmly. "But I know something more of human nature than you can, and I believe there is far more of bad than good in this man. If he is innocent where is his evidence? He has not brought an iota of proof."

Grace smiled mysteriously.

"The proof will be forthcoming in good time," she replied.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked her father and husband simultaneously.

"That is my secret. I have undertaken to clear Bob Rockett of this crime. I have not succeeded yet in my efforts, but I hope to succeed. I think I am on the track of the necessary evidence."

Despite all their questioning nothing more could be got from her. She answered them with smiling mysteriousness.

"Just wait. You have got to be part of the general public. After all he has done for me I will never desert him. I owe him a life for a life."

She took the first opportunity to glance at a slip of paper which she held in her hand, and which had come to her that morning from the prison of Bob Rockett.

"If I was but free now I would find him," it read. "I have been thinking it over since I have been here. He is with Marie Ormiston. She pursued the life of a professional gambler in company with George Delorme. But, Roger Glendon is an expert at card play. He has run through his money and is poor. Undoubtedly that is their object in leaving New York. They have started out on a tour of gambling. They can be best found by following the ordinary

routes of the gambling fraternity. Confer with my lawyer. He will know where to look for such characters. And lose no time. The days are growing precious now."

She had followed the suggestions of this note, and a series of shrewd eyes were already on the look-out for two such characters, in every city where such a course of life could be profitably followed.

But we must, for the present, step in advance of her telegrams and get our eyes ahead of those of her agents.

In the parlor of a small, but neat inn at Rochester, N. Y., two persons are seated. It is several days later than the date of the above given conversation, yet the subject of their conference, is the same as that which proved so interesting to Grace Essex.

It is in fact, Roger Glendon and Marie Ormiston. He is seated in his usual nonchalant attitude, his toe on the edge of the table and his chair pushed back, while he plays indolently with a sheet of music, over which he had been glancing.

She has been at the piano carelessly running her fingers over the keys, but she swings around on the stool in response to a remark from him.

"It's an outrageously awkward business, that about Bob Rockett," he said, as he picked up a newspaper and ran his eye over it. "Somehow I can't swallow it that Bob had all that in him. But I'll be hanged if I know what to make of this last job; his giving himself up to the police. Anxiety to help them take the other fellow, eh? That won't do, Bob. That's decidedly too thin. You never was such a confounded fool as that."

"Who is this Bob Rockett?" she asked.

He looked at her for a moment and then burst into an amused laugh.

"By Jove, Marie, you ought to know," he exclaimed. "Who is he but your friend with the spectacles; the young gentleman to whom you owe such compliments."

"That villain!" she cried, her eye flashing. "But you told me that he was dead—that you settled him yourself, for his treachery in that bank job."

"I fancied I had. But Bob has a hard head and he came round all right again. Don't be so hard, my dear," he laughed. "It was only diamond cut diamond between you and him you know, and his diamond proved the sharpest. You must not bear malice."

"I don't like him, at any rate. And I don't fancy that you can make me like him."

He continued to muse.

"I don't know. Wasn't I with Bob on the day of that murder? Let me see—the 26th of April—on Thursday. By Jove, that was the day! I know it now because it was the day I sold my horse. Who knows but I might prove an alibi?"

"Don't you trouble yourself about such matters," she shrewishly replied. "We have our own business to look after. Let this man take care of himself."

And for a week thereafter she fought down the rising sense of duty in her easy-virtued companion, as they moved from place to place in the exercise of their chosen profession of fleecing the card-playing community.

At the end of this week they found themselves in Cincinnati. There they put up at one of the principal hotels and prepared to look around them, and test the capacities of that place for their special business.

Marie was an adept in the art of inveigling the unsuspecting into her toils, her former experience during her life with George Delorme having taught her all the mysteries of her disreputable business.

Roger had just parted with her at the ladies' entrance to the hotel, and had lounged into the mahogany office, where he now occupied himself in looking over the names in the hotel register, with the hope, perhaps, of discovering some game for his bait.

A touch upon the shoulder aroused him from this occupation. He turned and looked into the face of a person who was a perfect stranger to him.

"Well, sir?" he curtly asked.

"Excuse me, but could I have a few minutes' private conversation with you?"

Roger looked at him questioning for a few moments, asking himself what this man could want with him. He finally said:

"Very well. I have no objections. Particularly as I am curious to know what business you can have with me."

The man made no reply, but led the way to the reading-room of the hotel, where he took a seat by a table in an unoccupied corner.

Here, before speaking, he opened and glanced over a newspaper that lay before him. Finally, placing his finger on a special paragraph, he lifted his eyes to Roger, who was curiously regarding him.

"Do you take any interest in this murder trial, that is going on just now in New York?" he asked.

Roger started with surprise.

"Is that what you brought me here for?"

"Yes. I wish to read you some of the evidence in the trial of Michael Crapper, which has been proceeding now for two days."

"I am much obliged to you," answered Roger, a little angrily. "But I prefer to choose my own reading and readers."

"Only a moment, sir. It appears here on undoubted evidence that the murder took place at the hour of half-past ten on the morning of Thursday, the 26th of April."

"Yes."

"But there is another accused of this murder, who was not seen in the house until after eleven o'clock on that morning—one Robert Rockett."

"Well?" asked Roger.

"It is claimed that he was in the room in company with Crapper and took part in the murder."

"Very well."

"But, suppose now that it could be proved that he was not there at that hour? Suppose an alibi could be proved?"

"He could snap his finger at them, then, I should say," returned Roger, indifferently. "But, my dear sir, I am not interested in this matter. Why have you pitched on me to bore me with your murders?"

"Because it is you that must prove the alibi. Because you are wanted in New York, Roger Glendon!" That afternoon telegraph messages flashed swiftly between Cincinnati and New York, and a smile of hope replaced the anxious look which had been growing deeper in the eyes of Grace Essex.

The denouement of her work was drawing near.

CHAPTER XIII. THE MURDER TRIAL.

It was an impressive scene. The venerable judge upon the bench, with his dignified associates; the group of shrewd and earnest lawyers in the inclosure below; the crowding throng that filled every spare inch of the large room; and the utter silence that prevailed between the questions and answers of counsel and witness, in the intense anxiety to not lose a word of this interesting examination.

It was the trial of Bob Rockett as an accessory to the murder of Sarah Crapper. He stood erect in the dock, as calm and unmoved as though he were but a spectator of the scene, and winning good opinions from all sides by his sturdy bearing.

The trial of Mike Crapper had been concluded the day before, in a verdict of guilty, and he was remanded to prison to await sentence. But every effort to induce him to clear Bob Rockett of the charge of complicity in the murder had failed. He evidently bore ill-will against the man who had brought him to trial for his crime, and he persistently declared that Bob had been present and taken part in the murder.

Yet, the evidence given by the witnesses did not seem to corroborate this. It looked rather as if the husband and the wife had been alone.

"Can you state at what hour of the morning these noises were heard?" asked the prisoner's counsel of the witness on the stand.

"At half-past ten o'clock."

"You are sure of this?"

"Yes."

"What makes you sure?"

"Why, sir, my clock had run down, and I had just gone into my neighbor's room to get the time to set it. It was but a minute or two after half-past ten. I had left the room and was going back to my own, when I heard a scream and a heavy fall, that seemed to come from Mike Crapper's room."

"Had you heard any noises from that direction previous to this fall?"

"Bless you, sir, they'd been fighting like cats and dogs for a good hour before. But that was nothing new, for they were a nuisance with their fightings."

"Did you hear any other man's voice, besides that of Michael Crapper?"

"I couldn't say as to that, for I wasn't giving them much attention. Howsoever, I didn't notice nothing strange."

"What did you do after hearing the fall?"

"I run down to Mike Crapper's door. There was three or four of us, for the noise had shook the whole house."

"Go on. Tell what happened."

"Why, we found Rusty Mike standing outside, with the door tight shut behind him, and looking savage enough to eat us all up alive. He wanted to know 'what we was arter?' and told us in pretty plain English to tend to our own business and he'd tend to hisn."

"Did you hear any noise in the room behind him?"

"Not a whimper. It was as still as death."

"And what did you do?"

"I gave Mike Crapper a piece of my mind," answered the witness, placing her arms akimbo, and looking as if she could repeat the operation at short notice. He kept mighty mute while we was talking, and he let us go without hardly a word back, which wasn't a bit like Rusty Mike, for he had a rascally impudent tongue of his own."

Several other witnesses were examined to the same effect, it being apparently the object of the lawyer to fix precisely the moment of the murder, and also to show that it had been preceded by a sharp domestic quarrel, of a kind to which the presence of a third person would have acted as a damper.

This point fixed another witness was called to testify to the time at which Bob Rockett had been seen in company with the murderer.

"I was a-standin' at my room door," testified this good woman. "It was then ten minutes past eleven. I'll tell you how I know, as I s'pect you'll be axin' me next. Well, Mrs. Brown had, a bit afore, been in to see me 'bout the time, cause her clock had run down. But arter she got into a bit of a scrimmage with Rusty Mike she clear forgot it. And that was how she come back ag'in for the time. Well, arter she left, I was a-lookin' out my room door, when who should I see but two men a-comin' down the stairs, of which the one was Rusty Mike? T'other I didn't quite see the face, only sort o' sideways. But he was as much like the young man there afore us as two peas. I ain't a-swearin' it was him, now mind you, cause 'tain't easy to 'identify a man by his shoulders."

The burden of all the evidence thus elicited was to the effect that the murder must have taken place at half-past ten o'clock—that, at ten minutes past eleven, Mike Crapper had been seen descending the stairs in company with a man resembling the pris-

oner at the bar—and that the fact of the murder was not discovered until an hour afterward, when a stream of blood had been seen running out under the door. On forcing open the room door Sally Crapper had been found, lying on the bed, with the side of her head crushed in, and with the appearance of having been dead for a considerable time.

The prosecuting attorney now undertook the cross-examination of the last witness, she who had testified to the finding of the dead body.

"Will you please state to the jury what was the appearance of the room when you entered it?"

"Well, sir, for the room itself, its appearance was pretty much what it generally was, 'cept for the blood on the floor, and the stick with which the poor thing had been murdered, and which had a knob on it as big as your fist, sir, and blood on the knob."

"Have you seen this coat before?" holding up a rough-surfaced spring overcoat.

"I couldn't swear to that," shaking her head dubiously. "Only it looks just like a coat that I found on the chair-back in that there room, on that occasion."

"This is not cross-examination, your Honor," cried the prisoner's counsel, springing to his feet and addressing the bench.

He was unexpectedly interrupted in a most unusual manner. The prisoner, who had retained his upright, firm attitude, and had intently listened to all that had passed, now addressed the court in a clear, calm tone.

"Excuse me, Mr. Johnson," he said, "but please let him go on. The court wants the truth, and I don't want to hide it. The coat is mine. We have no object in trying to conceal the truth."

This sudden and frank avowal went like a shock of earthquake through the room. The judges stared in surprise, a sound came from the lips of the audience that was almost a cry of approval, Mr. Johnson, the lawyer, sprung to his feet with a face reddened with anger. He was on the point of a sharp rebuke to the prisoner, when his eyes fell upon the faces of the jurors. He sunk quietly back upon his seat. He was keen enough to perceive, in their expressions, that his client had done more to bias them in his favor than all the witnesses that could be brought. Frankness and honesty had told.

"This cannot be permitted," exclaimed the principal judge. "We cannot allow such irregularities. The prisoner must keep silent."

Yet despite his assumed severity, it was evident to all keen observers that the accused had moved him also in his favor.

Several minutes passed before the trial could be resumed.

Further examination of witnesses elicited the fact that the coat had a slight clot of blood upon the right sleeve, such as might have been got by one assisting to lift the body to the bed.

It appeared also that the handkerchief in the pocket of the coat was slightly discolored by blood.

All this had been adverted to by Mr. Johnson in his opening address to the court.

"But," he had continued, "though unfortunately there was no eye present to tell just what occurred, yet the circumstances of the case were such as must show clearly the innocence of my client. Is it a reasonable theory, gentlemen, that any sane man, after having assisted in a murder, would have deliberately thrown off the coat which was stained with the red witness of the crime, and leave it behind him to serve as evidence against himself? I hope to show that he did nothing of the kind, that he was not in the room at all, but that his coat was put there by Michael Crapper himself, and dipped in the blood by this treacherous wretch, so as to make of an innocent visitor a seeming associate in his crime."

This point which it seemed impossible to prove, was wonderfully cleared up by the next witnesses. Blood flowing freshly from a wound, and blood which has lain for a half-hour in a pool, are by no means the same fluids. The evidence of a physician was taken, who had made a microscopic examination of the blood on the sleeve, and who testified that it had undoubtedly been put there after the blood had partly clotted.

Such was not the case with the blood on the handkerchief. That undoubtedly was fresh blood. As to how it came there no evidence was forthcoming, for Bob's statement that it had been received from a cut on his own hand was not evidence for the court.

Yet evidently the sentiment in the prisoner's favor was gaining strength in the court. His manly bearing had as much to do with this as the doubts which had been cast on the points against him. Even in the faces of the jury the reflection of this sentiment deepened.

The face of the prisoner's counsel manifested a growing anxiety as the moments wore on. His eyes wandered frequently to the door of the court-room. His ears seemed strained to catch every sound from without. Yet a look of disappointment gradually grew upon his countenance.

All the witnesses who had been called were examined. The lawyers were busy with their notes. The judge looked somewhat impatiently toward them.

"Your honor," said Mr. Johnson, rising, "I had hoped to produce another witness, of far more importance than any that have yet been examined. I had hoped, indeed, to prove an alibi in my client's case. As this important witness is not forthcoming, I must request a continuance of the case until tomorrow, so that I may be enabled to offer his testimony."

The judge looked doubtful, and conferred for several minutes with his associates.

"I am afraid this cannot be," he answered. "The court is too crowded with business. You have had

plentiful time to procure your witnesses. The trial must go on."

Mr. Johnson followed in an earnest plea for a continuance, but the judges were not to be moved.

The disappointed lawyer seated himself again rather angrily. Only for a moment, however. A noise outside had attracted his attention. Several persons were pushing into the crowded room. He sprang to his feet, and a flash of light shot across his face.

"A continuance will not be necessary, your honor," he cried. "My witness is here."

There were a half-dozen persons in the group which had crowded into the room. Among them were our friends, Grace and Paul Essex, and this greatly-needed witness, Roger Glendon.

An immense bustle pervaded the room as these persons made their way toward the inclosure and Roger Glendon, at the request of Mr. Johnson, entered the witness stand. What was intended to be proved by this man no one knew, but that it was to be very favorable to the prisoner was evident enough.

We will dispense with the preliminary portions of his examination.

"On the morning of Thursday, the 26th of April," he continued, in response to a question, "I walked, in company with Robert Rockett, along Grand street. I parted with him at the corner of Broadway."

"How came you to separate at this point?" asked Mr. Johnson.

"He told me that he had a matter of business with Rusty Mike, as he called him. As I did not care to see that gentleman, I did not accompany him."

"At what hour was this?"

"At exactly eleven o'clock."

At this answer the feeling of the audience could be no longer restrained. A general cry broke out in the room, while the surge of feeling that arose even took the bench in its course.

"How are you sure that this was on the 26th of April, and that the hour was as stated?" asked the lawyer.

"Because I had an appointment at half-past eleven of that morning with John Brand, the owner of a livery stable on Fourth avenue, and I looked at my watch on leaving Mr. Rockett and found that I was likely to be late. I know the date from the fact that my appointment was for the purpose of selling him a horse. I have here the bill of sale."

Mr. Johnson took and glanced over the document.

"This is dated April 26th," he announced, passing it to the jury.

"How long would it take to reach Michael Crapper's residence from the point at which you parted with Mr. Rockett?"

"Probably five minutes, with quick walking."

It was impossible to bring the audience again into a state of calmness. Grace Essex had made her way to the side of the prisoner and offered him her hand, over which he bent with tears of gratitude in his eyes.

The trial went on in a hasty and confused way. The case was too evident for any further questioning, and on being given to the jury they made no pretense of leaving the box to decide on a verdict.

"Do you find the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty!" came in the clear tones of the foreman of the jury.

Then a shout that seemed enough to lift the roof broke from the assembled multitude. But Bob Rockett only kissed the hand which he held and which was wet with his tears, while his head was bowed in thankfulness and prayer.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PLEASANT CONSUMMATION.

A YEAR has passed since the date of our last chapter. There only remains to us to briefly describe some of the events of that year.

As to one of our characters we do not need to dispose of him since the law has saved us that trouble. We refer to Mike Crapper, who has at length escaped from the demon of remorse which pursued him, by the aid of the hangman's rope. Crime with him has reaped its fitting reward. Pocket-picking, burglary, murder and death on the scaffold, such has been the tale of his life. He has lived and died an example to all those who step aside from the strict path of honesty.

As for one of his old associates, Beau Bink, the fate of Rusty Mike has certainly scared him out of his illegal courses. The would-be exquisite was, in fact, never a rogue in grain. His criminal courses were always confined to pocket-picking, and he has even given up this avocation through horror of the end of his old associate in crime.

The attempted bank robbery, in which so many of our characters were involved, has fallen into the background before the more important events detailed in these chapters.

"So long as the bank is none the worse for the effort," remarks Mr. Garland, "I think it will be as well to let the affair drop; particularly as we have no positive proof against any of the suspected parties."

"And as, through it, I have gained a dear wife," continues Paul Essex, pinching Grace's finger.

"And I a teasing husband," rejoins Grace, laughingly pulling his ear.

"And besides," broke in Mr. Garland, "I have changed my sentiments toward young Rockett. There is good in the fellow; much more good than bad, I must admit. Poor boy, perhaps I had something to do with driving him into his evil courses, for I was very harsh with him. I saw him in the court room on his trial, and he certainly held himself like a man; and an honest man in grain. I must try and do something for him."

"Oh! will you?" exclaimed Grace, clinging to his arm, and looking up eagerly into his face. "Will you give him a chance? Will you take him into the bank again?"

"I can hardly promise to do that, Grace," he replied. "After all that has happened the directors would scarcely consent. And I doubt very much. Rockett would accept such a situation. But something can be done. I can get him into some honest business, and give him a chance."

"Thanks, thanks, father! I have such an interest in him."

"Come, come, Grace! I shall be jealous of your friend, Bob Rockett, if you go on at that rate," cried Paul, laughingly.

"Very well, sirrah. If you prefer, I am sure I have no objections. I owe him at least three very important favors. I am afraid I will not be able to pay them all off."

"Why, you little wildfire, you have paid off two of them already," exclaimed Paul. "You persuaded him to be an honest man, and saved him from his pursuers. We will call that one. You brought him Roger Glendon to clear him of the murder charge. That's two."

"And now you have coaxed me to get him on his feet again. That's three," chimed in her father.

"Very well, but I fancy I owe him some back interest yet," persisted Grace.

"By the way," continued Mr. Garland, "what has become of Roger Glendon?"

"He has disappeared from New York again," answered Paul. "Gone to rejoin his associate, I suppose."

"That is a man in whom there is no good," remarked Mr. Garland, decidedly.

"I fear not," answered Grace. "After his heartless effort to put out Paul's eyes, for I think there is no doubt but it was he that acted as ringleader of those burglars."

"He will come to a bad end," averred Paul, shaking his head. "He is one of the kind who always go from bad to worse."

It is, as we have said, a year after the date of our last chapter. During that period Roger Glendon and Marie Ormiston, his companion, have diligently pursued their course of fleeing weak-headed dupes.

She has employed her charms of face and manner to lure these moneyed weaklings to their ruin, while Roger, by his skill in gaming has finished the work, and turned them penniless into the street. There is no robbery; nothing that the law can take hold of. Oh no! it is all fair; quite as fair as to put your hand in a man's pocket and take out his purse. But the legal scoundrels have been losing as well as their victims. They have been losing their souls, while the victims have lost only their purses.

It is May again. A noble steamer is making its way rapidly down the broad Mississippi. Our gambling pair have just made Louisville too hot to hold them, and are on their way to Nashville, where they hope to reap a new harvest.

But they believe in making hay while the sun shines, and Roger has worked up a little match at cards between himself and a rather rough-looking borderer. "Just for amusement, you know."

Yet the betting has been rather high considering that it is only amusement, and a considerable crowd of lookers-on are gathered around the table, deeply interested in the game.

Some ladies are present in the saloon, and more than one of these is looking eagerly on at the players. But Marie Ormiston, who has most reason to be interested, is seated at the remote end of the cabin, occupied only with her fan, and paying no heed whatever to the excitement around the players. She has faith in Roger.

"A cool hundred on this hand," says the borderer, looking at the cards which Roger has just dealt him.

"Five hundred better," Roger quietly answers.

The borderer looks up from his cards, and a quick flash shoots into his eye. A person who stands behind Roger, is carelessly holding a small mirror in such a way that the gambler's hands are clearly shown to his opponent. The latter detects a peculiar motion of the fingers, and his eyes blaze with sudden passion.

"I see your five hundred!" he cries, flinging his cards face upward upon the table. "Here are my pictures. Four Jacks."

"Four aces," Roger quietly rejoined, displaying his cards also.

"You lie, you infernal scoundrel! One of those cards came from your sleeve."

In an instant he is on his feet, has caught Roger's left arm, and drawn several cards from their place of concealment in his loose sleeve.

With a cry of alarm the spectators back off from the table. Marie has dropped her fan and is on her feet.

"I lie, do I?" ejaculates Roger, with restrained anger. "Drop that money, you hound, or I'll measure your coffin for you."

But the infuriate Westerner is as quick as his antagonist. Revolvers flash out simultaneously. That of the borderer, who is more accustomed to quick work than his rival, cracks spitefully. Roger, shot through the breast, falls headlong to the floor, his own weapon exploding as he falls, and sending its ball through the roof of the saloon.

But his antagonist is not to escape so readily. Another sharp crack; a light puff of smoke; the successful duelist falls prostrate in his turn.

"That for revenge!" cries Marie, as she springs forward, pistol in hand, through the shrinking and horror-stricken observers, and seizes the money that lies upon the table.

Before any one thinks to stop her she has left the cabin, and is lost amid the crowd of passengers in the other part of the boat. The whole thing has passed so quickly that no one has even been able to observe her face sufficiently to know her again.

As for the two prostrate gamblers, Roger Glendon is found to be stone dead; shot through the heart. His antagonist is wounded in the shoulder, a dangerous, but not fatal wound.

And so we part with these two of our characters, Roger Glendon to his grave, Marie Ormiston to a life through which we do not care to follow her.

As for Bob Rockett, we may discover him—at the very moment when Roger fell dead before the pistol of his antagonist—in a little office in Wall street, New York. Said office is neither remarkable for size nor furniture, but it is big enough for Bob, as he has often said. And for the tall, lank, withered old chap, with the dandyish affectation, who is writing away for dear life at its single desk, it is a perfect palace of sumptuousness.

"It is a little better than your parlor, with the cobweb hangings," said Bob, in response to the praises of this individual. "You remember the shanty down on Blair street, Beau?"

"Don't I?" answered Beau Bink, for it was no other than that individual. "That was the last place where I followed my old business. Tell you what, Bob, it's nice to feel you're in an honest line, and can laugh the perlice in the face. Ain't it, now?"

"I fancy so," laughed Bob. "And nimble fingers with the pen pay as well as in folks' pockets, eh?"

"Better, better! There's a peccoliar satisfaction 'bout it all, as I could never feel in the old trade," and Beau scratched his ear, and then dashed into the details of his work as if his pen was a race-horse and had only a minute to make the half-mile turn.

"Well, well, Beau, I must be away. Got fifty thousand bushels of barley to push off on the floor to-day. Choice Canadian at that, my boy. Ought to get a prime figure, eh?"

Seizing his hat Bob went briskly from the office, chanting a verse of a popular song as he disappeared.

He looked very different from when we last saw him. Clean shaven, smoothly combed, his face full of animation and hope, dressed neatly and fashionably, he was a very different figure from the fugitive we lately saw shirking the police, or the prisoner on trial for his life in court.

"Honesty pays." Such was the burden of Bob's song. "The same energy and wit given to business as to rascality will bring twice the returns in money, and six times the returns in satisfaction. That's my experience."

In fact, Bob Rockett was now a full-fledged broker on the New York Grain Exchange. Mr. Garland, seeing the bent of his mind, had quickly determined that no quiet line of business would suit his temperament. Something active and exciting was needed for Bob. After looking around the whole field the experienced banker had ended by purchasing him a footing on the floor of the grain exchange, and entering him as a full-fledged broker.

It was just the opening that Bob's energies needed. He had quickly built himself up a good business, and was already making money with a rapidity that kept his admirer, Beau Bink, in a state of endless admiration.

On his return from the Board, on the day in question, he cried out jubilantly to Beau, on opening the door of his office;

"A splendid sale, Beau! Barley has riz. Got three cents above yesterday's market.— Ah? Oh! excuse me, Mrs. Essex; I did not know you were here."

"I am glad to see that you are doing so well," said Grace, holding out her hand.

"It is all due to you," answered Bob, gratefully.

"It is all due to yourself," she replied. "I have only partly repaid your benefits. By the way, at father's request, I wish to invite you to take dinner with us to-morrow. Can you come?"

"Certainly. I shall only be too happy."

"And— But what was the burden of that little song I heard you humming, when I was last here?"

"Honesty pays best," answered Bob, with a laugh.

"The newest, truest and best song out."

And so upon them all we drop the curtain.

THE END.

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